

ABSTRACT

**FROM ENTRANCE TO ENGAGEMENT:
EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT NEW ATTENDEES IN A FAITH
COMMUNITY**

by

Alan E. Johnson

Over the years, a significant number of practices and strategies have been created to assist churches in greeting and welcoming new people. Yet often the guest's point of view is ignored. What from the guest's view is positive and engaging or just good marketing to them? Therefore, it was important to do a research study on the experiences of guests when they first visit a church so that churches can better create positive and engaging experiences for the guests they have.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in Nazarene churches with an average worship attendance of 250 to 999. The research focused on mid-sized Nazarene churches located in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. The goal of the study was to provide insight and strategies for churches to create more positive guest experiences and reduce negative guest experiences and thus provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return, encounter the life-transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and engage in the life and mission of the church.

The two categories of participants in this study were senior or lead pastors and guests or new attendees. Pastors participated by taking the online pastor's survey and by

being involved in personal interviews. Guests or new attendees participated by taking the online Guest Survey and by being a part of a new attendee focus group. A researcher-designed survey was the primary instrument used to identify and measure pastor and guest experiences and attitudes.

Six major findings emerged from this study.

First, a welcoming and friendly culture of intentional engagement by regular attendees with guests and newcomers had a positive influence on guest retention.

Second, personal contact by a pastor was a significant factor in guest connection and retention.

Third, the sermon was a central factor in the engagement of newcomers.

Fourth, personal invitation and word-of-mouth positive talk about a church were the major factors that lead people to visit a church.

Fifth, adult classes and small groups were significant in creating an atmosphere and connections that engage newcomers into the body and life of the church.

Sixth, children and youth ministry must be a continuing church wide and multigenerational emphasis in a local church to reach, minister to and engage families.

As a result of this study, five recommendations are proposed to improve the practice of ministry.

First, each local church should do an annual guest and hospitality inventory with those involved in the church's greeting and welcome ministries. Look at the building and ministries through the eyes of a guest: single, married, with small children, with teenagers and senior adults.

Second, each local church should hold regular focus groups or listening sessions with recent attendees and ask them these open-ended questions: What is an example of something positive that you experienced when you first visited our church? What negative experience(s), if any, did you have to overcome? How can our church be more guest friendly? How can our church better help new attendees engage in the life, ministry and mission of the church?

Third, Third, the local church should hold an annual training event for everyone involved in greeting and welcoming ministries. Church leadership and staff should be involved in the training and the welcoming and greeting ministries. The organizers of the training sessions should invite recent guests to share about their experiences and include discussions about how the church can continue to improve guest services.

Fourth, the pastor should preach annually on the practice and culture of hospitality in the body of Christ using Biblical and theological foundations and give the congregation a short list of hospitality practices that everyone should employ regularly as part of the church.

Fifth, the pastor should make issues of hospitality and engagement part of ongoing conversations of church staff and leadership meetings and incorporate the goals and practices of positive guest experiences as part of every ministry and program.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
**FROM ENTRANCE TO ENGAGEMENT:
EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT NEW ATTENDEES IN A FAITH
COMMUNITY**

presented by

Alan E. Johnson

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Dissertation Coach

Date

Representative, Doctor of Ministry Program

Date

Dean of the Beeson Center

Date

FROM ENTRANCE TO ENGAGEMENT:
EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT NEW ATTENDEES IN A FAITH COMMUNITY

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Alan E. Johnson

May 2018

© 2018

Alan E. Johnson

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
CHAPTER 1 NATURE OF THE PROJECT	1
Overview of the Chapter	1
Autobiographical Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Project	3
Research Questions	4
Research Question #1	4
Research Question #2	4
Research Question #3	4
Research Question #4	4
Rationale for the Project	4
Definition of Key Terms	5
Delimitations	8
Review of Relevant Literature	9
Research Methodology	11
Type of Research	11
Participants	11
Data Collection	12
Data Analysis	14
Generalizability	14

Project Overview	15
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT.....	16
Overview of Chapter.....	16
Biblical and Theological Foundations	16
The Greatest Commandment	17
The Great Commission	21
Christian Hospitality	22
The Body of Christ.....	28
Attaining to the Whole Measure of the Fullness of Christ	31
Literary Foundations	35
Hospitality.....	35
Guest Experience	40
Engagement.....	46
Interpersonal Experience	57
Retention and Attrition	62
Research Design Literature.....	73
Summary of Literature	74
Project Overview	76
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT	77
Introduction.....	77
Nature and Purpose of the Project	77
Research Questions.....	78
Research Question #1	78

Research Question #2	78
Research Question #3	81
Research Question #4	83
Ministry Context for Observing the Phenomenon	86
Participants to Be Sampled About the Phenomenon	87
Criteria for Selection	87
Description of Participants	87
Ethical Considerations	88
Pilot Test	89
Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants	90
Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected	96
Reliability & Validity of Project Design	98
Review of the Chapter	99
CHAPTER 4 EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT	100
Overview of the Chapter	100
Participants	100
Research Question #1: Description of Evidence	106
Research Question #2: Description of Evidence	110
Research Question #3: Description of Evidence	121
Research Question #4: Description of Evidence	128
Summary of Major Findings	143
Review of the Chapter	144
CHAPTER 5 LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT	145

Overview of the Chapter	145
Major Findings.....	146
First Finding	146
Second Finding	149
Third Finding	151
Fourth Finding	152
Fifth Finding	153
Sixth Finding	155
Ministry Implications of the Findings.....	158
Limitations of the Study.....	160
Unexpected Observations	163
Future Directions for the Study.....	166
Review of the Chapter	168
Postscript	169

APPENDICES

A. Dissertation Matrix: Overview	172
B. Pastor Introductory Email Template.....	173
C. Pastor Introductory Follow-up Email Template	175
D. Pastor Participant Consent Form	177
E. Pastor Online Survey Template	179
F. Guest Introductory Email Template.....	183
G. Guest Participant Consent Form	184
H. Guest Online Survey Template	186

I.	New Attendee Focus Group Questions.....	190
J.	Pastor Interview Questions	191
WORKS CITED		192
WORKS CONSULTED		204

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1. Qualitative or Quantitative Questions.....	91
Table 3.2. Research Questions Addressed by Each Instrument.....	97
Table 4.1. Guest Evaluation of Guest Experience	112
Table 4.2. Guest Experience Areas of Influence	114
Table 4.3. Pastor Evaluation of the Guest Experience	118
Table 4.4. Pastor View of Areas that Influence Guest Experience	120
Table 4.5. Guest Influences that Lead to a Church Visit	132
Table 4.6. Pastor View of Guest Influences for Visiting the Church	134
Table 4.7. Guest Church Experience	135
Table 4.8. Pastor View of Guest Church Experience	137

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation represents a major accomplishment in my life. The educational achievement of receiving a Doctor of Ministry has been a dream of mine since receiving my Master of Divinity nearly thirty years ago. It comes out of a passionate desire to be a faithful and effective pastor through the Church of the Nazarene and more importantly a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. I am thankful for the many people who have encouraged, prayed for, mentored, coached and counseled me from the time I came into a personal relationship with Christ till now.

First, I give thanks to my wife, Paula. You have been my faithful and devoted cheerleader and encourager. Thank you for all you have done and do for me. You are my one and only. I love you and thank God for the life we have together.

Second, I am grateful to my parents, Robert and Marcella Johnson for the legacy of faith handed to me. My life has been invested in and shaped by your unconditional love, encouragement and sacrifice.

Third, I am appreciative of the staff and membership of the church I currently serve as lead pastor, Rogers First Church of the Nazarene in Rogers, Arkansas. Thank you for your support and encouragement in fulfilling this dream. You continue to show me the love of Jesus through your lives and ministry.

Fourth, I am thankful for Ralph Waldo Beeson, the administrative and teaching team at the Beeson Center at Asbury Theological Seminary, and fellow members of the 2013 Beeson Scholars Cohort for your investment in my personal and professional development. My life and ministry will forever be shaped and enriched by the relationships we have forged.

Fifth, I give thanks for Rich Houseal, Senior Research Program Manager, Research Department of the Church of the Nazarene at Global Ministries Center (GMC). He has been a significant help in bringing this project to completion. His knowledge and expertise in doing research with the Church of the Nazarene is invaluable. He helped in getting authorization to access the pastors and guests who participated in the survey. Further, he provided data from the GMC data base; coached the author in building a valid survey and setting up the process for collecting and organizing the data.

Sixth, I owe thanks and appreciation to Dr. Robert Danielson, who coached me through the dissertation process and offered valuable critique and comments on my writing. Dr. Danielson is part of an amazing team of people including, Dr. Russell West, Dr. Milton Lowe, Dr. Ellen Marmon and the faculty and staff of the Doctor of Ministry program, who invested in me, challenged me, guided me and supported me throughout the entire Doctor of Ministry process.

Finally, I am grateful to the USA Nazarene people and pastors who willingly participated in the survey and focus groups, providing data to make this study possible.

CHAPTER 1

NATURE of the PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

There is a growing need to understand the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of new attendees in mid-sized Churches of the Nazarene in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. This project is designed to address that need. The rationale for the project, key terms used, and key themes are outlined in the chapter. The research questions devised for the project and data collection methods are described.

Autobiographical Introduction

I have served as lead pastor in three different mid-sized Churches of the Nazarene over the past twenty-seven years: one in California, one in Texas and currently in Arkansas. Through these years, I have seen or personally welcomed thousands of people who came through the doors of these churches. They came in various ages, shapes, sizes, dispositions and backgrounds. Some had been part of a church their entire life; others had come to church for the very first time. Some had just moved to the area; others had lived in the community for years. Some had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; others had no apparent sensitivity to or interest in a relationship with Christ. Some were looking for a church home; others were just looking. Some had come by way of invitation or recommendation; others had come of their own cognizance and with their own personal reasons. All of these people had different reasons for coming to church. Some found a place of belonging, acceptance and spiritual deepening, while many more left the church after one or more visits, never to return. Through the years, I have heard a

multitude of reasons as to why people returned and engaged in the life, fellowship and ministry of the church, but I have heard only few reasons and explanations of why people left or did not return.

What is puzzling to me is the number of those who left or did not return who indicated on their visit how much they enjoyed the worship service, the warmth and fellowship of the people, the spirit and atmosphere of the church. Some stated how they had experienced God in a fresh way in the church service or ministry. Some indicated their desire to meet with a pastor to talk further. Some even expressed their desire to join the church, but most of them did not return and gave no indication as to why. They just didn't come back, and the majority did not respond to follow up letters, phone calls, emails, texts or personal contacts.

Our church, like many other churches, had well-developed and well-staffed greeting ministries, along with established follow up practices. People were assigned to serve as greeters at the church entrances, welcome center, sanctuary and kids' check in areas. People were trained on how to welcome and engage guests, introduce them to others, sit with them, help them feel comfortable in a new setting and minister to them. Our people were positive. There was a high level of involvement. Yet, even with all of this, we have had only a 10-15% retention rate of new attendees. We are not alone. I have heard similar challenging stories of new attendee retention when talking with other pastors and local church leaders. Though numerical growth is not the ultimate indication of health and discipleship of a church, I have always believed that healthy churches are growing churches, not only in spiritual depth and maturity, but also in the number of people who make up the church body.

This research project was designed to identify the experiences that most encourage and those experiences that most discourage further attendance and engagement in a local church. It has been my goal to help the church where I currently pastor and other churches to be more effective in fulfilling the Great Commission and to connect people to a vibrant, transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

Statement of the Problem

Church attendance is in decline in the United States. Most churches are seeing fewer and fewer guests (McIntosh, *Beyond* 19). When guests and new attendees do come, the majority do not stay. Even though all churches have some type of formal or informal strategy and process to meet, greet and engage new attendees, most retain only a small percentage of new attendees who find a place of connection and belonging in the church that leads them to continued attendance and engagement.

The problem confronted in this study is focused on the experiences new attendees have that encourage or discourage their coming back a second, third, or fourth time to a church and ultimately becoming engaged in the church. How can churches create more positive experiences and reduce negative experiences for new attendees so as to provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return and enable them to engage in the life of the church and encounter the life-transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research project focused on identifying the primary experiences that guests and new attendees have that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement in the church. The research was focused on Nazarene

churches with an average worship attendance of 250 to 999 located in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. The ultimate goal of this project is to provide insight and tools to help churches create and foster positive experiences that encourage newcomers to engage in the life of the church and encounter the transforming message and life of Jesus Christ.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research of this study.

Research Question #1

What are the strategies and practices that churches actively utilize to retain new attendees?

Research Question #2

What are the experiences that new church attendees have that encourage ongoing attendance and engagement?

Research Question #3

What are the experiences that new church attendees have that discourage ongoing attendance and engagement?

Research Question #4

What are the most effective strategies and practices that the mid-sized church can utilize to retain new attendees?

Rationale for the Project

There are at least five different rationales for this project. The first and foremost reason for this project is to help churches create a conducive environment for new attendees to experience a transforming encounter with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

This is the most compelling reason of all since the mission of every church and believer is to make disciples. Such disciple making begins with creating positive and encouraging experiences for new attendees. Positive guest experiences open the door for new attendees to find a place of belonging, acceptance, a personal walk with Christ as well as a place of discipleship and ministry in and through the church.

The second reason for this project is to help churches be more effective in the retention and engagement of new attendees. If churches do not retain and engage new attendees, growth cannot occur.

The third rationale for this project is to help churches create positive experiences that encourage ongoing church attendance and increase engagement of the new attendee in the life of the church.

The fourth reason for this project is to help churches reduce negative experiences for new attendees. One negative experience can diminish and even nullify the effects of a multitude of positive experiences. Negative experiences may also increase the frustration level of church members and staff.

The fifth rationale for this project is to help churches make effective use of people, material and financial resources in ministering to new attendees. Churches need to be good stewards of their resources and use them in the most effective ways. The findings of this research project may also be used to assist in regular hospitality training for staff and congregation.

Definition of Key Terms

Key terms that are used in this project include:

Mid-Sized Church – For this study, a mid-sized church is defined as a church with an average worship attendance between 250 and 999 people.

Guest - A guest is a person who visits a local church for one or more times. A guest may also be referred to as a new attendee.

New Attendee - A new attendee is a person who visits a local church for one or more times. A new attendee might also be referred to as a guest. A new attendee may also refer to a person who has continued to visit a local church but has not yet joined as a member or become an active participant.

Newcomer - A newcomer is a person who has attended a local church but has not yet joined as a member or become an active participant. The word newcomer is used in place of the word guest or visitor once a person begins to regularly attend worship services of the congregation. A newcomer may also be referred to as a new attendee.

Hospitality - Hospitality is the process by which churches make people feel welcome. In a broad sense, hospitality is to give strangers food, shelter and safety (Pohl, *Making* 4). Hospitality is a form of ministry that shows care, concern, compassion and love through service. For the Christian, hospitality is to welcome others as Christ has welcomed them.

Experiences - For this study the word “experience” is the act or process of observing or directly perceiving events or reality. For most people perception equals reality. People make decisions based on perceived positive and negative experiences.

First Impressions - These are the mental images or perceptions a person has when visiting a church for the first few times. It is how they view what they see and experience. This can include friendliness of people, childcare and children's facilities and

personnel, signage, cleanliness of grounds, parking accessibility, entry area, interior signage, restrooms and more.

Engagement - Engagement is the process whereby a new attendee is purposefully connected into the life, relationships, customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture of a local church congregation. Fully engaged describes a person who celebrates and connects with the identity, values, and mission of the church to which he or she belongs. To the degree he or she is able, the fully engaged member contributes to the vitality of the congregation through his or her time, talents, and resources (George, *Assimilation* 14). Disengagement, on the other hand, is when a person distances or completely separates himself or herself from the life, relationships and ministries of the church.

Assimilation - Assimilation is the process a person goes through from being a first-time attendee to becoming engaged and active in the mission, membership and ministries of the church. Assimilated persons feel accepted and have developed interconnectedness with others in the church body (Searcy 105-110). Such persons have a sense of belonging and have become involved in some type of ministry. They are missed when they are absent. Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Church*, says, "Assimilation is the task of moving people from an awareness of your church to attendance at your church to active membership in your church" (Warren 309). Nelson Searcy, author of *Fusion*, says, "Assimilation is the process in which a new member identifies with a local church through membership, active attendance, service, and relational interaction with other members" (Searcy 105-106). For a church, assimilation includes helping people to share a common experience of Christ as Savior (Orjala)

Discipleship - Discipleship is the process of spiritual growth in which one becomes a disciple through conversion, and then matures in his or her knowledge of and obedience to Scripture (Tenney 2:129-130). Discipleship is the ongoing process of spiritual growth that involves evangelism and spiritual formation. A disciple refers to a person who has come to faith in Jesus Christ, is growing in their faith, serving with their gifts and seeking to carry out the purposes of God in their life and church. In other words, a disciple is a fully devoted follower of Jesus (Tenney 2:129-130).

Member - A member is a person who has been officially received into church membership by public declaration during a worship service. Membership in a local church is where believers share a common set of beliefs, values and mission that joins them together with other believers to carry out the purposes of God for that local unified body.

Delimitations

This research project is limited to Churches of the Nazarene located in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. These four states were selected as a sample group due to their proximity to the researcher and their greater access opportunity for possible focus group meeting locations. This project is also limited to mid-sized Churches of the Nazarene in the sample group. A mid-sized church for the project is defined as a church with an average worship attendance between 250 and 999.

This research project is limited to the experiences of guests and newcomers who had visited participating churches within the previous six months. Participation in the study was limited to adults over 18 years of age and was open to males and females of all ethnicities. The scope of the project presumes that a participating church has guests and

newcomers visit their church, has ministries and programs aimed at reaching new people and has some direction and structure for assimilating and engaging newcomers into the life and faith of the church.

This research project is limited in focus to the experiences of guests and newcomers that encouraged or discouraged continued attendance and involvement. The project did not deal with the strategies and programs aimed at assimilating and engaging newcomers into the church once they start attending on any regularity. There are many resources available on organizing and implementing hospitality, greeting and follow up strategies and ministries that can be tailor made for a church.

This research project is limited by the lack of guarantee or consistency as to whether a person who was invited to participate in the study would actually take the online survey, complete it and submit it. Invitation for participation was made by email to pastors of mid-sized churches in the four state regions. They, in turn, were responsible for sending an email inviting guests to participate in the research survey. Therefore, it may be that a pastor completed the pastor's survey yet failed to send out the guest survey invitation or if he or she did, the guest may have chosen not to participate.

An additional limitation of the project may be the openness and transparency of participants completing the survey. They may have been overly nice, trying not to be offensive or, they may be overly critical, due to a life situation, more than an actual experience related to a church visit.

Review of Relevant Literature

A multitude of books, articles, websites and seminars available today seek to resource and help pastors, churches and leaders with hospitality, interpersonal

relationships, church growth and discipleship. The goal of this research has been to find current and notable resources available relating to the church guest experience. The types of literature drawn from for this project includes books in print and e-books, Doctor of Ministry dissertations, journal articles, online articles and blogs of leading church resource groups, experts and practitioners, and selected church greeting and hospitality training programs designed to equip and empower pastors, church leaders and laity with skills and strategies in guest relations and assimilation. In addition to the biblical and theological foundations of the project, the focus of literature reviewed in this research project had significant input on the key themes and topics of hospitality, guest experience, engagement, interpersonal relationships and retention.

Though many authors were consulted and cited in this project, there are several who were considered by the researcher to be leading voices speaking into each of these five themes listed above. Christine D. Pohl and Henry G. Brinton are notable voices in the area of hospitality. They provide a comprehensive understanding of the roots traditions of hospitality in the Christian faith and culture while providing contemporary illustration and application. Notable voices in the area of guest experience include Nelson Searcy, William Tenny-Brittian, Mark L. Waltz, Bob Farr, Kay Kotan and David Durey. Notable voices in the area of engagement include Bob Adams, Gary L. McIntosh, David Durey, Douglas Tanner and Earl Ralph Hux. The Doctor of Ministry Dissertations of Durey, Werlein, Tanner and Hux enriched the researcher's understanding of the issues related to guest experiences and engagement as well as influenced the design and content of this study. Notable voices in the area of interpersonal relationships include Joseph R. Myers and Mark L. Waltz. Notable voices in the area of retention and attrition include

Thom S. Rainer and Rick Warren. A literature review of relevant literature as well as biblical and theological foundations for the project are presented in Chapter 2.

Research Methodology

This research project employed a variety of research methods to identify the experiences that new attendees had that encouraged or discouraged their continued attendance and engagement in a church. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed.

Type of Research

Pre-intervention research methods were used in this study. The focus was to identify, describe and evaluate the experiences that encourage or discourage guests when they first attend a church.

The goal was to identify and understand the underlying attitudes, values and motivations of guests, new attendees and pastors, in order to then offer insight into the challenges of creating positive guest experiences.

The primary instruments used were researcher designed web-based surveys for guest participants and pastors of selected churches. However, focus groups of selected new attendees and personal interviews of selected pastors were also employed.

Participants

Participating churches were selected from statistical data provided by the Nazarene Research Center in Lenexa, Kansas. A list was compiled of all mid-sized Churches of the Nazarene in a four-state region: Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. The list of churches that had an average worship attendance of 250 to 999

people contained thirty-five potential participating churches. Following the identification of potential churches, the senior pastor of each church was invited to participate in the research project by personal phone call and email. The Nazarene Research Center also provided basic demographic data for each church.

There were two categories of participants in the study: senior or lead pastors and guests or new attendees. Persons in each of the categories could participate in two ways.

Senior or lead pastors could participate by taking the online pastor's survey. The second way was to participate in a pastor's interview. The number of pastors was linked to the number of churches invited to participate in the study.

Guests or new attendees who had attended one of the participating churches sometime within the previous six months could participate by taking the online guest survey. The other way to participate was to be part of a new attendee focus group. The number of participants was associated with the number of guests and new attendees that each church had over the sampling period. Guest and new attendee participants were limited to adults over the age of 18, either male or female. The actual number of participants in the online survey was based on the number of guests and new attendees who responded to the email invitation and took the online survey. The last question in the online survey asked the respondents to indicate their willingness to participate in a focus group or personal interview. Only those who were willing were invited to participate in the focus groups and personal interviews.

Data Collection

A researcher-designed survey was the primary instrument used to identify and measure the experiences and attitudes that guests and new attendees have when first

visiting a church. (See Appendix H.) The survey was adapted for use by participating pastors to examine their thoughts, impressions and assumptions related to guest experiences. (See Appendix E.) The content of the survey and focus group discussion was designed to address the project research questions and fulfill the objectives and rationale of this project.

A group of six individuals, made up of non-participating pastors, pastoral staff members and lay leaders, pilot tested the web-based pastor survey and guest survey to check for content validity and functionality.

An introductory email was then sent to each potential participating pastor inviting him or her to participate in the study by taking the web-based pastor's survey. Pastors were instructed to send an email to all guests and new attendees who had visited their church within the previous six months inviting them to participate in the guest survey. The email contained the text for the guest email for pastors to use in inviting recent guests to participate. Each email contained a link to an informed consent form that in turn led to the survey. Confidentiality was insured by the exclusion of any name-identifying questions.

Personal phone interviews were conducted with randomly selected pastors. (See Appendix J.) Focus groups of new attendees were held in private locations. The questions asked were open ended. (See Appendix I.) Responses of the participants were digitally recorded and later transcribed to provide a verbatim record of the responses for the research. Handwritten notes were also taken during the interviews and focus groups to record any physical movements or inflections that were not captured by the digital recording.

Data Analysis

The data from the online pastor's and guest surveys, pastor interviews and new attendees focus groups was organized and arranged into a reportable format. The researcher then compared and contrasted the data and identified the differences and similarities through coding. This explorative analysis identified patterns, categories and themes along with exceptions and omissions related to positive and negative guest experiences. This analysis along with charts and graphs is presented in detail in Chapter 4. The findings of the study have been interpreted in light of the purpose of the study and presented in detail in Chapter 5.

Generalizability

This study is based on the mid-sized Church of the Nazarene, but it may be equally insightful for other churches. The research and findings of this study are not limited to the use or benefit of the participating churches and pastors. If other churches were involved in a similar study, many of the same issues and themes may very well be evident. Other research projects that follow the basic steps of this study could benefit from identifying and evaluating the experiences of guests and new attendees in their context or research group. The results of such a study may include differing positive and negative issues and categories that could be used to improve a church's guest experience and hospitality.

The findings of this study may also inform and assist other mid-sized churches in creating ongoing positive and engaging guest experiences with the goal of creating a physical and relational environment in the church that would be more conducive for

people to encounter and experience the saving and transforming grace of Jesus Christ in their lives.

Project Overview

This research project includes five chapters. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological framework of the study as well as a review of current literature pertinent to the dissertation project. Chapter 3 details the methodology and context for the study as well as the collection and analysis of the data. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the data analysis gathered in this study. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the study, including an evaluation and interpretation of the findings, and provides practical directions for further studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the biblical, theological and literary foundations for the care, engagement, and assimilation of guests and newcomers into the life, mission, and ministry of the church. The biblical and theological parts of this chapter examine a number of key Old Testament and New Testament passages and themes showing the mind and heart of God concerning the research topic and practical guidance for the church. The examination of the biblical and theological foundations assumes the primacy and authority of Scripture as God's self-revelation and the disclosure of His will for all people. The review of current literature is divided under five thematic sections based upon key topics related to the field of study of guest experience and engagement. The philosophical backgrounds are examined for each of these themes as well as their pragmatic implications and applications.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

A multitude of biblical references and themes provide a foundation for the understanding, motivation and application of intentional engagement and assimilation of newcomers into the life and mission of the church as the fellowship of believers. The five thematic areas of biblical and theological examination addressed in this chapter are: The Greatest Commandment; The Great Commission; Christian Hospitality; The Church as the Body of Christ; and, Attaining to the Full Measure of the Fullness of Christ.

The Greatest Commandment

From Genesis to Revelation, it is quickly apparent that the story of God revolves around love (Oord 71). In fact, Christianity is the only religion and belief system that teaches that the all-powerful, all-present and all-knowing God is love (1 John 4:16b). This illustration of love is demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus. 1 John 3:16 tells us: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." It is through Jesus that we know what love is because through Jesus' self-out pouring ministry and crucifixion God has shown us what real and godly love looks like. And then after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit continues the work of extending that love to us, and therefore, makes it real (Oord 98).

The biblical meaning of love is clear. Thomas Oord says that, "to love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being. To say the same thing in others words, to love is to respond to the inspiration of others - especially God - and by that response effect genuine flourishing" (Oord 73). Love is not just a statement of possession or some state of being; it is a verb that denotes action. It is intentional and deliberate. Love gives, and it involves a response. 1 John 4:19, NIV says, "We love because He first loved us." In other words, "We are able to love since God first loved us and thereby enables our human response of loving" (Willamson 151). And because Christians are loved by God they can love one another. As John says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11, NIV).

In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus lays out basic instructions for how the church should love. It is called The Great Commandment: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-39, NIV). Jesus draws this commandment directly from what is known in Jewish and Biblical studies as the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4-6.

Throughout culture today the word ‘love’ is greatly abused and watered down. Because of this, Hare states that,

It is important to remember that the primary component of biblical love is not affection but commitment. Warm feelings of gratitude may fill our consciousness as we consider all that God has done for us, but it is not warm feelings that Deuteronomy 6:5 demands of us but rather stubborn, unwavering commitment. Similarly, to love our neighbor, including our enemies, does not mean that we must feel affection for them. To love the neighbor is to imitate God by taking their needs seriously (Hare 260).

John Wesley, in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* states, "God is the first object of our love: its next office is, to bear the defects of others. And we should begin the practice of this amidst our own household" (Wesley, Ch 11). We also should not forget that those others have the job of putting up with our defects as well.

When one loves God, his or her love of God spills out in their love for others. Because God loves us, we now have a model of how to love others. His love for us creates in us a true capacity to love someone else. It is His love at work in us through His Holy Spirit that creates and empowers love in us for others (Galatians 5:22).

To love others is foundational in all Christian theology and practice. 1 John 3:11, NIV states, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one

another.” John's understanding of what it means to love is straightforward and unpretentious. And it finds its expression in everyday applications in life like sharing what one has with others in need (1 John 3:17-18, NIV). One's will and intentions are closely bound together with their actions. And the way one shows love is not merely with the words one says, but also in the way one acts. Talk is cheap and has little value when it is not followed by action. To say one loves and then to not actually do something for a brother or sister in need is to close one's heart to them. For John, love is not just a special way of feeling; it is a whole orientation of one's life and action (Smith 91).

John goes on to state in 1 John 3:12-15 that the converse of loving others is to hate them. He says,

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him (1 John 3:12-15, NIV).

In vivid illustration of the power of hate, Williamson says that, "When love leaks out it is often replaced by hatred. When hatred seeps in, a person opens the door to the possibility of becoming a murderer" (Williamson 123). It is when one moves beyond his or her needs to see and respond to the needs of others that love comes to life and grace is given room to flow.

The living out of love for others is not to be dependent upon feelings. (See John 13:34; 15:12,17; 1 John 3:23). Rather, according to John, it is an obligation that Christians should and can do. To love is to act in the same loving ways Christ modeled during His earthly life and how the Holy Spirit guides believers today (Williamson 121).

The Apostle Paul echoes the exhortation to love others in Romans 13:8 when he says, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law." Paul is saying that our obligation and command is to love God and to love others. William Greathouse warns of danger here. He states, "Love for 'neighbor' can quite easily be made to mean love for the one who is like-minded and congenial; but love is not Christian unless it includes the man who differs from me in every way" (Greathouse et al. 253). The love one has for others is not to be based solely upon one's own resources or inner strength or what one will get out of it, but rather it flows out of our love for God. As John says, "this is how we know that He lives in us" (1 John 3:24b).

In Colossians 3:12-14, the Apostle Paul lists out five great Christian virtues that God wants to be at work in every believer:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

These Christian virtues when put into effect "point to those qualities of life which, if present in the community of believers, will eliminate, or at least reduce, frictions. All of them are manifestations of love, which is mentioned in verse 14 as the crowning virtue." (Gaebelein, *Ephesians* 215). And it is this kind of love that forms the bond that fastens believers together in unity (Lucas 155).

The local church is the testing ground for love. It is in the church that believers learn about God's love and what that love requires of them. The fellowship of believers is "the context of social relations in which Jesus' disciples are called upon to love and care

for one another” (Oord 118). It is in the church that we learn to practice this kind of loving week in and week out. And practice makes perfect. “As we live together in Christian community, we learn how to respond appropriately time and again to what is required to keep such community alive and thriving” (Oord 118). The church is an “incendiary fellowship” that can cast both God's light and the heat of his love across a lost and lonely world (Trueblood).

The Great Commission

The mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations. This is the Great Commission given by Jesus to His Church in whole and to every believer in particular.

Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28:18-20). [Note: Other Great Commission passages include Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21 and Acts 1:8.]

The mission to make disciples of all nations is addressed to all followers of Jesus. Every believer is called to fulfill the Great Commission. As individuals and as the corporate body of the church, we are called to go and make disciples with eagerness and passion. This is to occur as part of our daily lives to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and make disciples (Hux 8). But more than not, believers often find themselves frustrated at the lack of success in reaching those who are disconnected from Christ and the church as they so desire and hope.

To make a disciple, the person must first be won to Christ. But it doesn't stop there. The new disciple needs to grow and mature as a disciple. So, it isn't enough to just preach or teach the Word and evangelize, as vital as these are. The entire church is to

move people along a maturity and discipleship continuum from unbelief to belief to maturity (Malphurs 18-19).

Acts 1:8 says that this is to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Great Commission was activated for the whole church on the day of Pentecost with the outpouring and infilling of the Holy Spirit (Lowe 13, Hux 9). All believers are to be witnesses, to preach the Good News and to bring people into the life of the church. Christians are to go to "all nations" and all people. This is locally, regionally, and even globally as individual disciples and communities of faith. As God, the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus sends His followers into the world so the world will believe in Him (John 17:18). This is the church's God given mission. "We are here to make disciples; to bring people to Christ; to cause people to become followers of the Savior; to seek and to save those that are lost" (Lowe 14). Engagement and assimilation of new believers into the church is a key part of the mission of God.

The Great Commandment and the Great Commission are based on the understanding that...

we are called to live in community, and our personal relationship with Christ must be grounded in the accountability, grace, patience, and love that only community can provide. God uses the relationships, challenges, and joys of gift-based service to help each of us grow in our relationship with him. Our walk with God is not about 'me and my God,' but about 'us and our God' (Mallory and Smith 3).

Christian Hospitality

A third area that the Bible and theology has much to say about is the theme of Christian hospitality. The significance of the place of biblical hospitality cannot be

overestimated. As Christine Pohl says, "Hospitality is a way of life fundamental to Christian identity. Its mysteries, riches, and difficulties are revealed most fully as it is practiced" (Pohl, *Making x*). Any time hospitality is practiced, it puts human flesh on the gospel story (Willis and Clements 41). The apostle Paul made this clear when he wrote: "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7, ESV).

The obligation to provide hospitality to the stranger was deeply rooted and highly regarded in ancient society (Dunn 743).

Hospitality in the ancient Near East played a distinctly important role in tribal and domestic life. Existence in the desert made it a necessity, and among the nomads it became a highly esteemed virtue. By it the stranger or weary traveler found rest, food and shelter, and asylum. It was supported by the thought that the host himself might someday be a stranger, and by the possibility that the stranger was divinely sent. Numerous Bible stories reflect its practice (Tenny-Brittian 3: 214).

In the Old Testament, a definitive account of this custom is found in the story of Abraham's and Sarah's entertainment of three strangers, who turned out to be angels (Genesis 18:1-8). Lot showed hospitality to two angelic guests in Sodom and protected them from abuse by wicked men (Genesis 19:1-11). Another example is the way that Abraham's servant was shown hospitality in the home of Bethuel while the servant was in search for a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:11-61). Nomadic hospitality was continued into the establishment of Israel as a nation. David made the son of Jonathon a permanent guest at his royal table (2 Samuel 9:7). Traditionally, hospitality included asylum for the guest. It was meant to provide the guest with protection and sustenance. Customarily a person could remain under his host's roof for three days in safety and receive protection for a given time after leaving (Tenny-Brittian 3:214, Pohl 26-27). (See Deuteronomy 4:41-43;

Joshua 20:1-9; Genesis 19:1-8; Judges 19:16-24.) This custom of hospitality assured strangers that they would receive at least a minimum of provision, protection, and connection with the larger community they happened upon (Pohl, *Making* 17). Within Judaism the memory of Israel's experience as "strangers in Egypt" was a powerful reinforcement of the impulse to hospitality and reminding of the particular care they were given them by God (Dunn 743; Pohl, *Making* 26-27). (See Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19.)

In New Testament times, inns existed in limited availability, and most people looked for hospitality in private homes (Tenny-Brittian 3:214). Jesus practiced hospitality in feeding the multitudes (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10), and His disciples (Luke 22:7-13; John 21:9-14). He also received the hospitality of others such as Simon the Pharisee and a Pharisee ruler (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-38; 14:1-24), Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42; Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-8; John 12:1-8); Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5-10); and the two on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:29:32). The disciples and early missionaries sought Jewish or Gentile hospitality wherever they went to new places to spread the Gospel. Without the grace of hospitality, the expansion of the church would have been severely limited (Clowney 183). Peter was entertained by Simon at Joppa and by Cornelius at Caesarea (Acts 9:43; 10:5, 23-48). Paul and his companions received hospitality in the homes of Lydia and the jailer at Philippi (Acts 16:14f, 25-34); Aquila and Priscilla, and Titus Justus at Corinth (Acts 18:1-3,7); Philip in Caesarea and Mnason at Jerusalem (Acts 21:8, 16); and Publius on Malta (Acts 28:7) (Tenny-Brittian 3:215). And, bishops and widows were to be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8). Hospitality was considered as essential to Jewish identity and a cardinal virtue in early Middle Eastern

life. And as the church grew and encountered persecution, “those in the Church who had suffered the loss of their goods, and those who had been compelled to flee for protection, were helplessly dependent upon their Christian brethren. Hospitality thus became a moral obligation” (Wiley 365).

For the early Christians, hospitality took on additional meaning tied to how they worshiped and lived together as a community of faith (Bocock 11). Acts 2:42-47 tells us that the early Christians shared their resources, besides worshiping and praying together. God used their generosity as a witness to their faith in Jesus Christ to those around them. Thus, hospitality is linked to experiences that Christians share in Christian fellowship.

Christians are to "practice hospitality." This is clearly stated by Paul in Romans 12:9-13, NIV. Paul says:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

These verses focus on the internal relationships within the body of Christ, the church.

(Dunn 738; Strauch 12-16, 33-35). In these verses, Paul gives a lesson in practical theology in showing that “love is primary, but if it is not sincere, it is not real love but only pretense. ...The whole believer’s conduct, in fact should be bathed in love”

(Gaebelein, *Romans* 132). If he fails to love his brother, doubt is cast on his professed

love for God (1 John 4:19-21). It is not that Paul is giving some inclusive law, rather,

“Paul is giving examples of the way grace is to provide the structures for the activities of Christians in their common life with one another within their Christian community. This is the way we are to respond to the grace that now orders our lives” (Achteimeier 198).

This call to put love into practice in the church "transcended immediate family ties and did not depend on natural or ethnic bonds" (Dunn 741).

To "honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10, NIV), is to give due recognition and show appreciation to someone. It is presumed that this honor is not to be based on some

...personal attractiveness that is perceived or usefulness that is known but rather on the fact that every Christian has Christ in his heart and is able to express Him through his own individuality. Consequently, this recognition is based on the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) rather than on the old. One honors God when he recognizes His transforming work in human life" (Gaebelein, *Romans* 132).

The Greek term for hospitality (*philoxenos*) is more expressive than the English form. It literally is transliterated "love for strangers" (Gaebelein, *Romans* 133). In explaining this further, Christine Pohl states,

When we offer hospitality to strangers, we welcome them into a place to which we are somehow connected - a space that has meaning and value to us. This is often a home, but it also includes Church, community, nation, and various other institutions. In hospitality, the stranger is welcome into a safe, personal and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations. Such welcome involves attentive listening and a mutual sharing of lives and life stories. It requires an openness of heart and a willingness to make one's life visible to others, and a generosity of time and resources (Pohl, *Making* 202).

The writer of Hebrews takes showing hospitality a significant step further. He says, "Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrew 13:1-2, NIV). In saying this, the writer in effect, points back to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. Therefore, "loving each other as brothers" (*philadelphia*) shows the corollary of "hospitality to strangers" (*philoxenia*). It is this quality of love that binds those in the Christian community together as brothers and sisters within the family of faith and

expresses the quality of that life experienced together (Lane 510-511; Strauch 16). "For Christians, a delight in the guest and host relationship reflects the expectation that God will play a significant role in the ordinary exchange between guests and hosts. This lends to hospitality a sacramental quality" (Lane 512). Hospitality then can be described as first and foremost an attitude, rather than merely an action. The supporting motivation in this passage to show hospitality is without parallel in other early writings.

The allusion to those who entertained angels as their guests without knowing it reflects the writer's sensitivity to the numinous qualities of hospitality that often enrich element of surprise that is sometimes stressed in the biblical accounts, when mysterious strangers become guests, revealing to their hosts the promise they are carrying with them. The stranger received is disclosed to be a bearer of gifts, God's special envoy, who has been sent to bless his children (Lane 513). (See Genesis 18:1-21; 19:1-3.)

This emphasis on the possibility of entertaining an envoy of God is directly connected to the declaration made by Jesus in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25. Jesus said,

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:34-40, NIV).

In other words, when believers practice hospitality with others, they are in turn extending that same hospitality to Christ himself.

Christ is the basis of the mutual welcoming which results in the unity of all humankind... The goal of God's act of grace in Christ is therefore unity among his creatures, a unity which... is to become reality in the present in the community of those who acknowledge God's gracious Lordship in Christ (Achte-meier 225).

New life in Christ is lived out in a community of loving service and acceptance.

Showing the fervency of the love believers are to show one another, Peter writes:

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:7-11, NIV).

The word translated "deeply" can also mean "constant" describing something that is stretched. In other words, the love of believers keeps stretching, in both depth and endurance, so that they may be able "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:17-19, NIV) (Clowney 179). It is the reach of God's love that has come to the church through Jesus Christ and is extended to every person who will receive it. This "love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8, NIV). It is not that our love can pay the price for sin. It cannot and never will. Jesus Christ did that through His sacrificial death. But "our love can imitate the mercy of God; our love can forgive, and forgiveness always pays a price" (Clowney 180).

The Body of Christ

One of the clear descriptions of the Church in the New Testament is the comparison of the Church, the community of faith to being like a body. This is what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 12:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ...Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where

would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ...But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-20, 24b-27, NIV).

The key points of this passage are largely self-explanatory and their overarching principles are clear. Body parts are interdependent, not independent of each other. In the New Testament, there are no individual or “lone-ranger” Christians who are not attached or connected to some local Christian church or fellowship. This is not to say it is impossible for a person to be saved and uninvolved, but detachment is unhealthy for that person (Blomberg 252).

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul emphasizes the necessity of having diversity in a body for it to operate as one. “Each part (such as the eye or the ear) must be willing to perform its own function and not seek to function in a role for which it was not made. The whole body cannot be a single part, or it would not be a functional body. So it is with the church” (Gaebelein, Romans 265).

God has not made all people the same, and He never intended to. The strength of the Church is not in its uniformity, but unity in the midst and in spite of its diversity. The same God who created the universe makes every person uniquely different and shaped for significance. God has given every believer in Christ special abilities, spiritual gifts and kingdom passions in differing measures and degrees than others. When each person operates in the realm of what they have been created to be, not only do they experience fulfillment and joy, but the entire body of Christ is also a beneficiary. God gives spiritual gifts so that the body will function in a healthy way with each differing part (or person)

working in concert together. Clearly these gifts are given not just for the benefit of one person, but for the sake of others. Properly using these gifts leads to balance and unity within the Body. In an unhealthy body, the parts of the body begin to operate independently or stop functioning at all. This is debilitating for any person and it is just as debilitating for a church. A healthy body is one that works together fulfilling its God given mission in life.

It is God's plan that every person come to saving faith in Jesus Christ and become part of the people of God, who by the Spirit are born into God's family and therefore joined to one another as one body, whose gatherings in the Spirit form them into God's temple. "God is not simply saving diverse individuals and preparing them for heaven; rather He is creating a people for His name; among whom God can dwell and who in their life together will reproduce God's life and character in all its unity and diversity" (Fee 72).

The emphasis on the Church being the body of Christ is an emphasis on the mutual dependence and concern of the various members of the body. Just as the organs of the human body – such as the eye, hand, head, and feet – need each other, so the members of the church with their various functions need each other. In God's economy, the least attractive and inconspicuous parts of the body are as important as any other and should be treated with respect (Gaebelein, *Romans* 265).

Being part of the body of Christ, members of the body are to feel and sympathize with the sufferings and celebrations of others (1 Corinthians 12:26). "Implementing this will require every believer to be regularly and intimately involved with a network of

Christian friends who commit to pray for each other and learn how to suffer and rejoice with each other through thick and thin” (Blomberg 257).

Spiritual life at its best happens in a faith community with people who have learned that they can help each other in their spiritual journey. It is a community of people who are passionate about encountering Christ on a regular basis because they know that where two or three come together in Jesus’ name, He is present with them (Matthew 18:20).

The Church then is not a building, though it meets together in buildings. The Church is made up of all who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives and unite under His leadership. Christ is the Head. Believers are the hands and feet who do the work of Christ on this earth. All believers are connected as members of Christ’s body to show the love of God to the world (Moore 84).

Attaining to the Whole Measure of the Fullness of Christ

The ultimate goal of every Christian and every church is to glorify God in Christlikeness. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul lays out the job description of every follower of Christ. He says,

It was He (God) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV).

Paul is saying that the church is alive. It is like a living organism. It isn't a stack of bricks formed into some random building. God is at work building and growing the church from the inside out as a reflection of who He is.

To do this, God raises up leaders to guide His people to carry out the work of the kingdom in being ministers of reconciliation. Their goal is that people will come to full faith in Jesus Christ and glorify God in faith and unity. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are to equip all Christians to carry out their varied ministries for the purpose of building up Christ's body, the Church. As we grow in Christ, we are to move toward maturity as we recognize who we are in Christ, how God has gifted us and then to offer those gifts to the body of Christ.

In this passage in Ephesians, Paul uses five key verbs: prepare, built, reach, become and attain. Each word is reminiscent of a body builder. Weight lifting is work. There is resistance and even pain, but it also produces growth. So, it is that the body of Christ is to be built up and grow. It is to be active. It is to get stronger with the goal of building unity in the faith and the knowledge of the living Christ - becoming mature and full-grown in the Lord.

We are to grow up "into Jesus." That is what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4:15, NIV, "We will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ." As the body of Christ, Christians are to grow up, but they don't do it on their own—they grow up in Jesus, who is the Head of the Body. The role of each Christian is to help others grow better in Christ.

When something isn't growing, it's dying. In the physical realm there is a medical term called atrophy. If a muscle is not worked, it will eventually decline and even die away. Children naturally grow. If they are not growing, something is wrong. The same is with the church. Growing up and becoming mature is what is supposed to happen. The church is being the church when its members are moving toward maturity—when they

grow up. Its members grow better when they grow together. They are to grow, and the church is to help each member do that. Newcomers are to be received into the life of the church and guided in their growth in Christ. It takes time to be disciplined and mature as a disciple. That is why it is so important to be part of the body of the church (Lowe 18).

The church is the “called out” ones who are called out to be sent. To be a sending church, the church has to equip, empower, and encourage believers in faith and truth. The church is to grow together in unity into maturity and in relationship. As the church does, it becomes more and more reflective of the body of Christ that God has called the church to be. When its members are what God called them to be, then the body of Christ is built up and its members are unified “in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, NIV).

Jesus calls every believer to find and develop his or her part in the Body, to grow in maturity and to go into the world around them in His power and name. The church is to be a church on the go. Believers are to be who Christ created them to be. Romans 15:1-2, NIV tells us that, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” The word “bear” means to carry. This is work that challenges the believers’ self-centeredness and focus. “...The refusal to live a life of self-pleasing should characterize every believer, whether strong or weak, and should extend beyond the narrow circle of like-minded people to all with whom we come in contact – in short, to our neighbor, whoever he is” (Gaebelein, *Romans* 151).

Divisions are offensive to God and in a different way to the world. Jesus came to break barriers down, not to be used as an excuse to create them. Division in churches hinders the world from believing in Jesus. “God intends His people to be a visual model of the gospel, to demonstrate before people’s eyes the good news of reconciliation” (Stott 111). In 1 John 1:7, NIV, John explains the significance of walking in unity and fellowship. He says, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son purifies us from every sin." God's work in believers purifies them (*katharizei*, present tense) and can be understood as having a continuous aspect of purifying. So, as they walk with God, the purifying continues (Williamson 69). Cleansing is both what God does for the believer and a continual unfolding reality as they are obedient to Christ. This in turn empowers and enables them to live in a holy and purifying relationship with God. As they keep walking with God, God keeps purifying them, not based on their own merits, but because the merits of Christ's death are applied to their lives (Williamson 69). Thus, their relationship with God through Christ enables believers to have fellowship with one another.

The importance of maintaining and strengthening a believer’s fellowship with other believers in and through the church cannot be overestimated. In Hebrews 10:23-25, the writer challenges believers to be faithful in unity and mission:

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:23-25, NIV).

The phrase "hold unswervingly" connotes being firm, stable and steadfast. It is the image of maintaining one’s course, not swerving to the one side or the other. The writer of

Hebrews is calling for the community of faith to remain steadfast and to “affirm its privileged status as the people who have been granted access to God through Christ” (Lane 289). “When we hold fast to the confession of our hope, we are doing far more than holding on to a doctrine or abstract idea; we are holding on to the One who gives us hope, Jesus Christ” (T. Long 106). This challenge to continual caring for one another is to find “an expression in love, good works, and the mutual encouragement that active participation in the gatherings of the community makes possible” (Lane 289).

Every Christian has responsibility to care for others in “love and good deeds.” By considerateness and example, they are to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” that distinguishes them as a community (Lane 289). This type of concern and care is to be active no matter the cultural climate as tangible expressions of caring love. The active concern and support of believers for the welfare of one another are critical in the life of the church where they are continually exposed to testing and disappointments (Lane 289).

Literary Foundations

The review of current literature is divided into five thematic sections based upon key topics related to the field of study of guest experience and engagement. These five topics include hospitality, guest experience, engagement, interpersonal relationship, retention and attrition. Each of these themes is interrelated and interdependent.

Hospitality

Hospitality is of utmost importance in the life and the health of the church. “God has shown us love and grace, so we show love and grace to others – this is the foundation of Christian hospitality, on which all of our practices are built” (Brinton 15).

In today's consumerist culture, the people who come through the doors of the church on any given Sunday will many times decide whether or not they like the church and if they will or will not return within the first seven to ten minutes. The sermon might be dynamic, the choir or band outstanding, and the audio visuals state of the art, but if a person does not feel wanted and welcome, most likely, they will not return for a second time (Perry 7; Searcy 105, Hux 57).

What is hospitality and why is it so important?

In 1991, the Disney Corporation released the movie *Beauty and the Beast*. It was an immediate hit with children and parents alike. One of the key phrases in the film was "Be Our Guest." That phrase became the catch phrase for the vision of Disney for all of their cast members (that's what they call their employees). Everything Disney does is done with the guest in mind (Adams, *Disney*). In describing the importance of this mindset for Disney, Christopher Perry states:

The leaders of Disney wanted to intentionally train every person in the company to view those who walked into their stores and theme parks as guests, not customers. A guest is someone to be welcomed in, to be treated with all of the hospitality you can muster. A customer is someone you want to purchase something from you so that you can increase your profit margin. A guest is a friend to be respected. A customer is a 'thing' to be used (Perry 7).

When it comes to hospitality, the church can learn a great deal from Disney by actually viewing visitors as guests and inviting them in. Being hospitable is welcoming another person "into a place to which we are somehow connected - a space that has meaning and value to us" (Pohl, *Making* 201). Hospitality provides "multiple ways for people to find their way into our story, no matter where they are in their life" (Perry 8). In a real sense hospitality is an attitude and an atmosphere. In reference to the atmosphere of hospitality, Christine Pohl makes this observation:

In hospitality, the stranger is welcome into a safe, personal, and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations. Such welcome involves attentive listening and a mutual sharing of lives and life stories. It requires an openness of heart and a willingness to make one's life visible to others, and a generosity of time and resources (Pohl, *Making* 201).

Disney trains every cast member, no matter their position or role, with the “Be our guest” mindset. This mindset of hospitality is intentional. It is normal behavior for people to want to draw close to those they know and feel comfortable with. So, hospitality training in the church needs to teach and model intentional hospitality (Perry 10). Intentional hospitality seeks creates a culture where everyone in the church has the role and responsibility in hospitality (Kelley). The ultimate goal of Christian hospitality is show God’s love and create an atmosphere where “every person has the opportunity to hear the Good News in a way that speaks to them” (Perry 9).

The importance of hospitality cannot be overstated. As Perry states:

Hospitality is not just being nice. It is helping each person feel valued, welcomed, and wanted. Hospitality should not be something we do but part of who we are as representatives of Christ. When you show someone hospitality you embody the gospel to them. As Jesus said, when you give even a cup of cold water to someone, you’ve done it to him. There is no greater honor than that (Perry 10).

According to Robert Schnase, “hospitality practices the gracious love of Christ, respects the dignity of others, and expresses God's invitation to others, not our own” (Schnase, *Five Practices* 70-73). This is the heart of Christian discipleship and Christian community where there is a commitment to be part of the community of faith ourselves while also extending “God’s invitation to new life, showing people that God in Christ values them and loves them” (Schnase, *Five Practices* 70-73). Christian hospitality actively invites those who are not yet part of the faith, welcomes them into relationship, receiving them with openness and grace. Christian hospitality engages them and cares for

them so that they may find new life in Christ and a place of belonging in faith community that loves, supports, equips and encourages them to become part of the body of Christ and grow in faith. Through simple acts of hospitality, one conveys the truth that that every person is made in the image of God and is seen, welcomed and invited to “pull up a chair” and make themselves at home (Willis and Clements 51). Christian “hospitality chooses to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, initiate rather than sit idly” (Willis and Clements 26).

In an article titled “*Untamed Hospitality*”, Elizabeth Newman highlights three distinctive features of Christian hospitality: it is a gift rather than an accomplishment or performance, expresses an economy of abundance rather than scarcity and competition, and is political rather than separate and individual because it looks to the good of the body of Christ. Worship is a reminder of God’s gracious invitation to all people to be a guest in His kingdom. It also teaches those who enter that kingdom to be a distinctive community serving as hosts to one another. God calls those who are part of this community to be faithfully committed and generous to one another, not as individuals bound by legal duties or operating by legislative procedures, but as members together bound by God’s love. (Newman 11-19).

Hospitality is something members of the Body of Christ do together. Hospitality is undoubtedly a personal practice, but it is never just a personal practice. It is hard to do real hospitality outside of community with its shared life and practices (Pohl, *Grace Enters*). The practice of hospitality is an example and point of entry for the guest and the stranger into the fellowship of believers. Therefore, the practice of hospitality represents

and encompasses the initial and necessary process toward discipleship and assimilation (Pohl, *Making* 46).

Christian hospitality understands that every guest brings a gift. They challenge and stretch church members to look beyond themselves to new ideas, new ways of communicating, new ways of resolving problems and conflicts, and new ways of trusting and relying on God. As Ana Maria Pineda states, “To welcome the stranger is to acknowledge him as a human being made in God's image; it is to treat her as one of equal worth with ourselves - indeed, as one who may teach us something out of the richness of experiences different from our own” (Pineda).

Hospitality is not without its challenges and fears. When new people come to a church, members may fear reaching out only to be rejected. At other times members may draw back from extending hospitality because the needs of the ministry seem overwhelming, especially when it comes to people with great needs. Members may think that if they take one stranger into their lives, there may be others that will overwhelm them. Members could also believe that accepting even just one new person with needs could stretch them beyond their comfort zone. Then add to this the threat of terrorism, an active shooter, violence, anger and discontentment, it is no wonder that the fears and concerns for safety and security can so often triumph over hospitality (Hershberger 44). Yet in the midst of these fears, challenges and concerns, churches “...are called to imitate the ‘table manners’ of Jesus by being sacraments of God’s hospitality in the world... because it is through hospitality that we offer the most compelling witness of who God is, who we are called to be, and what the world through God’s grace can become” (Wadell 77).

A church that refuses to close in on themselves have much to offer others and receive the “benefits from the grace that comes in the guest or the stranger” (Pohl, *Grace*). As Jean Vanier, founder of the L’Arche communities, writes: “Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren’t afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share” (Vanier 266-7).

The focus of hospitality always has an outward movement, shifting away from self and toward the guest. This takes a great deal of effort, determination and time to create this culture and then to maintain and grow it (Farr & Kotan, *10 Prescriptions* 16; Marty). Reaching outward must always be a priority, because once a person or a church stops, they are saying by their actions that there is not much to welcome people into any longer. As Pohl states, “Communities that close in on themselves are communities that have very little to offer anymore, but also are not benefiting from the grace that comes in the guest or the stranger” (Pohl, *Grace*). Therefore, it is imperative for the church to foster and practice a culture of hospitality.

Guest Experience

A guest experience is how a guest thinks and feels after considering their interactions with the church. A guest experience begins when a person first comes into contact with the church and then continues well after they have visited. Bob Adams, modifying a definition from Beyond Philosophy, USA, states, “A Guest Experience is an interaction between an organization and a guest. It is a blend of an organization’s physical performance, the senses stimulated, and emotions evoked, each intuitively measured against guest expectations across all memorable moments of contact” (Adams, *Guiding 1*).

Most of the time guest experiences are more accidental than purposeful. They “just happen.” They often occur because a church is unaware or makes decisions without considering the consequences. Therefore, one of the main needs is to “identify the ideal experience you want to offer your Guest” (Adams, *Seven*). There are rarely second chances to make a good first impression (Tenny-Brittian, *First Impressions*).

A guest experience may well begin when a guest first looks at a church website or printed church materials. It may be a few minutes to weeks or months before the guest ever visits a church for the first time (Adams, *Guiding I*). Yet, the effects of that first experience may linger well after the first several visits.

According to Searcy, guests should be perceived as gifts from God. Every Sunday, people visit a church. Could it be that God only sends the number of guests to a church that a congregation will effectively care for? If this is the case, then taking care of guests, acknowledging and welcoming them represent an important responsibility of the church (Searcy 126-30; Hux 56).

Churches can claim an open-door policy and say they are friendly, yet undermine that message when the regular attendees may give off non-verbal signals that convey the message that guests are really not welcome (Hugenot; Musselman). If a guest does not feel like anyone really cares about whether or not they return, it’s pretty likely that they won’t (Tenny-Brittian, *5 Critical Mistakes*; Perry). A great first impression will not necessarily turn a visitor into a guest, although a poor first impression pretty much guarantees they won’t be back (Tenny-Brittian, *Connecting Part I*).

There is a fine balance between overwhelming a guest with too much attention and ignoring them. Both are extremes. Being ignored and treated as though they do not

exist is about the worst thing that can happen to a person. The last thing a guest wants to feel is invisible, but excessive attention can feel like an invasion of privacy. The Book of James advises, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19, NIV). A person doesn’t have to be great talker to be good listener. All they need to do is care about other people’s concerns. True listening involves being interested in other people and what they have to say (Galloway; Tenny-Brittian, 5 *Critical Mistakes*; Peters, *Are you Scaring*). Christine Pohl states, “The most important practice of welcome is giving a person our full attention. It is impossible to overstate the significance of paying attention, listening to people’s stories, and taking time to talk with them” (Pohl, Hospitality 40).

A guest experience is not just the physical, or just the emotional, or just the senses; it is a blend of all of these (Adams, *Guiding* 2). Each of these areas have very significant influence upon a guest experience. The physical includes factors such as location, facilities, phone calls, digital experiences, personal references and quality of services provided. The emotional component includes “the combination of physical aspects, the data received by your senses, and a person’s expectations” (Adams, *Guiding* 2). All of these contribute to evoking emotions. The senses component includes factors such as sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. These senses give information about the world around a person. All three of these emotional components combine to develop impressions and expectations. It is often said, “perception is reality.” This is true in many settings, but it is especially true for the guest. Their perception becomes their reality and it is framed by what they have experienced in the past and hope for the future. Every

guest has his or her own personal measurement yardstick. All of these come together to make a complete guest experience (Adams, *Guiding* 2).

Rita Hays points out that for many parents the ultimate decision for them as to whether they will visit your church again will most likely hinge not on their own experiences but on that of their young child. The church nursery is important for families visiting with young children and infants (Hays). Thus, hospitality is not only about welcoming adults and young people; it is also about extending hospitality and grace to every child.

In view of the great importance of hospitality to church health and growth, believers must each ask themselves, how then can a church help newcomers have a positive guest experience?

Lovett Weem gives four specific ways to help improve the guest experience. First, provide multiple entry or contact points besides the worship service (such as the church's website, mission opportunities, small groups, and community involvement). Second, treat newcomers as "guests" and not "visitors." Monitor everything that is done, said, written or supplied (such as parting gifts) from the perspective of guests there for the first time. Third, move from church-focused to discipleship-focused view of hospitality. The question is not how new people can fit in, but how they can grow as disciples through the church. Fourth, always ask, "Who is missing?" No church is right for everyone, but make sure that there are not unnecessary barriers for others to begin or continue their discipleship journey through your congregation (Weem).

Bill Tenny-Brittian gives a checklist on how a church can make a winning first impression. Attractive outdoor signage needs to point the way to the worship center and

childcare. Greeters must be friendly, gregarious, and “have never met a stranger” kind of people. Greeters should take their places no later than fifteen minutes before the service and stay there for fifteen minutes after the service begins. Deploy parking attendants, especially if your parking lot is over 60 percent full. Place parking greeters to welcome and offer assistance whenever possible especially during inclement weather. Position door greeters outside any door that might be used by a guest. Deploy lobby hosts to identify newcomers and steer them to the Information Center. Develop a staffed information center with your sharpest, most informed church members. Train ushers to be friendly and help guests as needed. Organize worship center hosts who make sure every single person in their assigned section is well greeted. Train your members to get to know those around them by having real conversations. Know also that rest rooms are the most important room in your church. The nursery must be safe, sanitary, secure, decorated well and well-staffed by friendly caring adults. Then ushers, greeters, parking lot attendants and greeters should return to their posts five minutes before the services ends to thank folks for coming, invite them to return, and assist those in need. “With only a few minutes to make a great first impression, you’ll need to make the best of every opportunity, from parking lot to worship center, rest rooms to nursery, make sure you’re putting your best foot forward” (Tenny-Brittian, *First Impressions*).

In order to be certain that guests are treated as guests, not visitors. Brinton shares four best practices in greeting guests: First, make sure each guest is greeted at least three times before seating. Second, greeters who project warmth and smile readily. Third, when giving directions, use an open hand rather than a pointing gesture. Fourth, once

worship begins, be responsive to guests' needs, but don't intrude or single them out (Brinton 20).

Tim Peters identifies that follow up is a key part to a positive guest experience.

He states:

There are a few things first-time guests expect when they visit your church. They expect to be greeted warmly; they expect to fill out a card with their contact information; and they expect someone from your church will follow up with them. Fail to meet any of these expectations, and they aren't likely to return for a second visit (Peters, *6 Ways*).

Peters also gives six effective ways to follow up with first-time guests: personal phone call from the pastor; a sincere thank you card; set up a face-to-face meeting; make a welcome gift door delivery; send a personalized welcome video; and connect through social media (Peters, *6 ways*).

Bob Farr, Doug Anderson and Kay Kotan share six people-focused essentials for becoming a church that connects with visitors: (1) Hospitality begins the moment people pull into your parking lot. (2) The first step in going from a stranger to a friend is knowing someone's name. (3) Think Guest, Not Visitor. (4) Every church needs a connector - a person or group of people who invest in building relationships with guests and help them "connect" into a ministry where the guests will get their needs met. (5) After-Worship Experience. The guest's experience upon leaving worship is just as important as their experience upon arrival. (6) It is critical to follow up within twenty-four to forty-eight hours (Farr, *Connecting*).

People are searching for churches that make them feel welcome, accepted, loved, needed and connected. By repeating, deepening, and improving on the practices of investing in and welcoming people, fruitful congregations share the gracious love of God

in Christ. The ultimate goal is helping guests to grow into the body of Christ's people (Schnase, *Radical*).

Engagement

Engagement is a term that has great popularity in the 21st century, especially in marketing, consumer research and communications. Engagement, like many words in the English language, can have many varied meanings. Engagement may indicate a formal agreement to get married; an arrangement to meet, to do something or go somewhere at a fixed time. Engagement might be a dinner appointment; a job or period of employment especially as a performer or an emotional involvement or commitment. Engagement could also indicate the state of being in gear, ready for action; contact by fitting together or a fight or battle between armed forces (Merriam-Webster; Oxford Dictionaries). In the church, engagement has many applications as well: attendance, participation, financial giving, serving, and more.

Scott Gould, in his book “The Shape of Engagement,” presents a framework for engagement that all churches could find useful in understanding the multiple and varied aspects of connecting with and engaging church guests. Gould defines engagement as “the process of making the most of a relationship” (Gould 8). Gould has the view that all relationships follow the same basic process. This process could be person-to-person, or between a person and a brand, organization, product or idea. Organizations that seek to nurture engagement must progress through the three levels of engagement maturity: engagement as expression, engagement as experience, and engagement as enablement. Engagement as expression is engagement that takes place around a message like music, emails, ads, and other forms of media. Engagement as experience is where people interact

with the organization. Engagement as enablement indicates that people have an enduring and enriching connection with the organization (Gould; Adams, *Engagement*). All engagement begins with a message. As Gould says, "...call it what you will – an offering, an invitation, an advertisement, a look in the eyes, a request, an outstretched hand, a speech, or a brand – but it always begins with this. You can't get away from it" (Adams, *Engagement*).

Not all engagement is equal. There are many different levels of engagement. Some people may be very engaged, others moderately engaged, and others hardly engaged. There are also time limitations in engagement. The sooner a person is involved in a level of engagement, the more potential there is further or deeper engagement. However, when there is inactivity over too long a period of time, engagement cannot happen (Adams, *Just Exactly*).

The Goal of Engagement

Engagement is a significant part of assimilating a guest as an active part of the church body. Assimilation is the process through which a person identifies with a local church through membership, active attendance, service, and relational interaction with other members (Searcy 105). The process of assimilation is sometimes referred to as integration or incorporation.

Several sources indicated a need for giving immediate attention to new attendees as part of an intentional assimilation process (Rainer, *Expectations* 24; Hux 88; Schnase, *Just Say Yes* 32).

Durey suggested from the findings of his research that churches utilize an intentional track for spiritual formation (Durey 142). New converts especially need

immediate follow up because they may not grasp the full meaning of their decisions and have no idea what to do next (Searcy 154-155).

Beginning the assimilation process prior to a prospective member's decision to join a church can enhance assimilation. Early assimilation should normally involve actions that allow for two-way communication between the prospect and a church member (Rainer, *Expectations* 24; Attebery 42).

Robinson encouraged the quick assimilation of each new attendee so that they could get —involved not only in fellowship but also in service. New attendees should have someone to guide them into the life of the church, nurture, and disciple them (Robinson 117). Robinson recommended steps to assimilate new attendees that included immediate personal follow-up within twenty-four hours, writing a letter of encouragement and instruction, assigning a mentor member who can provide nurture, making a visit from the appropriate Sunday school department, and hosting periodic new member receptions that provide time for getting acquainted (Robinson 118).

Schnase reiterates the need for action in engaging newcomers. He states that often,

...newcomers visit five or six times, then fade away. The fact that they return for several weeks indicates they find something meaningful and engaging. Perhaps the sermon or music or outward friendliness appeals to them. That they drift away means the church is not connecting with them (Schnase, *Just Say Yes* 32).

A Clear Pathway

Churches of all sizes experience difficulty in the engagement and integration process. Though this problem is common throughout all sizes of churches, ineffective engagement and integration is one of the most common problems plaguing mega churches today. A major way for churches to combat this problem is by developing some

sort of process or pathway for guiding guests and new attendees from the front door to faith to membership. Assimilation experts use terms such as pathways, entrance points, on-ramps, and next steps, to describe the opportunities that churches strategically place before new members (McIntosh, *Beyond* 132). In their book “*Simple Church*,” Rainer and Geiger state that these pathways or steps must belong to, and serve the purpose of, a comprehensive church strategy or process (Rainer and Geiger 115).

Tenny-Brittian outlines this process or pathway as follows: Guest → Attendee → Participant → Participating Member → Committed Member. As a visitor becomes increasingly integrated into a congregation, they experience subtle, but significant shifts in behavior and commitment. The more connected they become with the congregation, the deeper and more permanent their commitment becomes. Yet specific connections must be made for a person go from visitor to committed member. The goal of any pathway is to encourage and facilitate significant and meaningful connections with the church, with those in the church and with God. If any of these connections are not made it is unlikely that full integration into the congregation will occur. (Tenny-Brittian, *Connections 1*, 12-15). If, on the other hand, a guest builds friendships within the church, they are likely to become more regular in their worship attendance and increasingly active in the life of the church. They may try out a small group or Sunday school class with a friend. Ultimately, in churches that are intentional in their integration processes, visitors find themselves “clicking” with a ministry or mission of the church and becoming increasingly involved (Tenny-Brittian, *Connections 2*, 13).

Steve Sjogren presented a pathway of discipleship that is more like a cycle than a straight, linear path. He sees assimilation as a process where people move from hospital

to family to school to army then back to hospital (Sjogren 147). As a hospital, the church needs to provide caring ministry and places where people can begin to heal, feel loved and work on their issues. As a family, they find belonging and community as they learn about Christ's unconditional love. A school trains and equips them for life and ministry. As an army, they do the work of the church: intercessory prayer, serving, leading and helping (Sjogren 148). Guests and newcomers are guided and encouraged to take the next step in the cycle as they grow in relationship with Christ and others.

Arn and Arn give a detailed profile of an incorporated member using nine characteristics. The fully incorporated member: (1) "identifies with the goals of the church," (2) "attends church and worship services regularly" (3) "Identifies with the goals of the church," (4) "Attends worship services regularly," (5) "Experiences spiritual growth and progress," (6) "Becomes a member of the body," (7) "Has new friends in the church," (8) "Has an appropriate task or role," (9) "Is involved in a fellowship group," (10) "Regularly tithes to the church," and (11) "Participates in the Great Commission" (Arn and Arn, 149-156).

This pathway could also be identified as the process of discipleship or the process of spiritual growth in which a person becomes a disciple through conversion, and then matures in his knowledge of and obedience to Scripture (Tenny 2:129-130).

A number of assimilation processes that have been created and are available for adopting and adapting. No matter the plan or curriculum, the key is to choose and use something. However, the process should be so obvious that even those who are spiritually blind can see it (Tenny-Brittian, "Connection 2" 12-14). This is important because if the church fails to communicate the characteristics that define its identity, the guest is left only with subjective assessments of defining characteristics based on the experience of

his or her visit (George 81). “Some churches are not clear on a ministry process because they do not have one” (Rainer and Geiger 71). Every church needs strategically designed ministries that provide pathways of belonging that assist newcomers in gaining a sense of being part of the church (McIntosh, *Beyond* 132).

Saddleback’s four-base 101 system has been a popular and useful assimilation process for many churches. Some churches offer a series of “Introduction to ...” classes. Others design a path that begins with a one-on-one with the pastor, moves to involvement in a Sunday school class, and culminates in a confirmation or catechism course. So long as a guest can easily find the on-ramp to that journey, when they’re ready they’ll make their way to it (Warren 309; Tenny-Brittian, “Connections 2” 14). However, it is important to remember that plans and curricula are only effective as they are put into practice.

Sunday School

In many churches, Sunday school represents a strategic pathway of assimilation and incorporation. Rainer states that Sunday school is the single most important program in the church (Rainer, *Effective* 12-16). Rainer observed, “The research is clear if not overwhelming, Sunday school is the most effective assimilation methodology in evangelistic churches today... No methodology was deemed more effective than the Sunday School in retaining members” (Rainer, *Expectations* 32, 47; George, *Assimilating* 102). But in order to be effective, Sunday school must be administered in a strategic, purposeful, and organized fashion (Rainer, *Expectations* 36; George 102). When class members invited friends, relatives and coworkers to attend their classes, retention rates increased “dramatically,” concluding that “When the Sunday School is the front door, the

back door closes tightly” (Rainer, *Expectations* 47). In summary, Rainer’s research identified that the most effective evangelical churches are those whose Sunday school ministry is vibrant and central to the church’s ministry model.

New Member Classes

New member classes provide opportunities for connecting individuals and informing them about the church (Attebery 45). Rainer identified a clear relationship between assimilation effectiveness and new member classes after his study of approximately one thousand churches on the retention rates of new church members over a two-year period. The study found a 112% retention rate for churches that required a new member class, 89% for churches expecting but not requiring such a class, and 72% for those churches offering but not requiring a new member class. Rainer credited much of the impact upon retention and assimilation to the ability of new member classes to communicate a church’s high expectations (Rainer, *Surprising* 113-115). New member classes have been also used in revitalizing churches. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson discovered that 53% of “comeback” churches that revitalized after decline used new membership classes as a means to raise membership requirements (Stetzer and Dodson 124-125).

Lawless stated that new member classes were a key means of communicating church expectations and determined that both the actions and beliefs of church members matter (Lawless 32-33). Similarly, Robinson believed that new converts particularly need to learn what it means to be a Christian and that every church should develop some kind of new member orientation and assimilation plan (Robinson 202; Attebery 46-47).

Warren identified five questions that people ask when they come to a church and begin to attend. The first question is "Do I fit here?" This is a question of acceptance. People need to fit somewhere, and the church needs to provide that opportunity. The second question is "Does anybody want to know me?" This is a question about friendship. Warren says people are not looking for a friendly church as much as they are looking for friends. People deserve individual attention. The third question is "Am I needed?" This is a question about value. People want to be needed. If people feel that they can make a difference with their gifts and talents, they will want to be involved. The fourth question newcomers ask is "What is the advantage of joining?" This is a question about benefits. We must offer something worth their time and effort. The fifth and last question they ask is "What is required of members?" This is a question of expectation. People have a right to know what is expected (Warren 312-313).

Rainier stated that "High assimilation churches communicated that their Christian community expects much of everyone" (Rainer, *Surprising* 111). These high expectations should include attention to doctrine, polity, constitutions, ordinances, discipline policies, expectations, denominational history, tithing, membership requirements, and ministry opportunities (Rainer, *Surprising* 112; Rainer & Rainer 216-217).

McIntosh suggested the following content for the membership class curriculum: (1) Introduction to the mission, vision, and values of the church. (2) A clear statement of the church's expectations. (3) Overview of the church's beliefs and structure (including denominational affiliation as appropriate). (4) Review of how one becomes a Christian (evangelism). (5) Step-by-step instruction on how to become a member. And, (6)

Information on next steps after the membership class—joining a small group, class, or ministry (McIntosh, *Beyond* 141).

McIntosh called for new member classes that focused upon the basics of salvation, assurance of salvation, and other initial aspects of being a follower of Christ (McIntosh, *Beyond* 140). Lawless concluded that when we think of new member classes, we usually think of assimilation of new believers into the church. Yet new members class can also be used as a powerful evangelistic tool. If done with evangelism in mind, a membership class can be an effective tool for leading persons to Jesus (Lawless 26; Attebery 48). Rainer concluded from his research that “churches that require persons to enter membership through a new members’ class have a much higher retention rate than those that do not” (Rainer, *Surprising* 114). Rainer’s research revealed that 83% of new Christians involved in Sunday school remained active in church five years after joining compared to 16% of new Christians remaining active in worship only (Rainer, *Expectations* 45; Rainer and Rainer, 214).

Small Groups

Small groups are also effective in the engagement of newcomers and the assimilating of new believers and church members regardless of the size a church may be. Galloway identified five basic reasons that make small groups necessary for all churches: small groups provide multiple points of entry into the church; effective evangelism; the only means to truly care for people; accelerates an individuals’ spiritual growth; and shifts the church’s work from a pastor to people (Galloway 10).

Forty-four percent of successfully assimilated new believers in Durey’s study rated small groups as helpful to their spiritual growth (Durey 108). This affirms that new

Christian involvement in small groups is vital to retention (Rainer and Rainer 213). Small groups provide a simple and natural assimilation process that creates easy connecting points for friendships within the church (Osborne 35).

Involvement in Ministry

The engagement process is not complete until a new member's full integration and active participation in ministry to others occurred within the church (McKinney 90). Durey agreed that assimilation requires the involvement of new believers into actual ministry. Following the commitment of new believers to Christ and the church, the final step of assimilation occurs when they —take the responsibility and stewardship of personal ministry (Durey 3). Fully engaged describes the member who celebrates and identifies with the identity, values, and mission of the church to which he belongs. To the degree he is able, the fully engaged member contributes to the vitality of the congregation through his time, talents, and resources (George, *Assimilating* 14)

Lawless urged churches to recognize the limited time in which the opportunity exists to mobilize new members in ministry. Lawless referred to Charles Arn's research, which concluded that 80 percent of the people who leave a church do so within the first six months of their membership. Lawless interpreted this phenomenon as stemming directly from the new member's lack of relationships and responsibilities in the church (Lawless 45). Rainer said, "Effective assimilation churches have one primary characteristic that sets them apart from churches that do not, they keep their members in active involvement" (Rainer, *Expectations* 23).

Scott noted that once a person realizes that they are not simply being asked to support the pastor but are being called to use their gifts to touch lives, they will feel a

sense of excitement that will motivate them as never before. The key to assimilation is helping people discover their ministry. The key to reducing attrition is good assimilation” (Scott 58).

One of the easiest places for new people to get involved and serve is on a greeting or hospitality ministry team and thereby they help foster a culture of hospitality. Farr and Kotan stated: “Some of the best hospitality people are the newest people.” They have a fresh “memory of things that were challenging for them when they were a first-time guest.” They may also have “fresh ideas on how to create a more hospitable environment.” (Farr and Kotan, *10 Prescriptions* 21).

This level of welcome and engagement is described by Christopher Perry in how his church assimilates newcomers. Perry stated:

At my church we say that on your first two visits you’re an honored guest, a child of the King, visiting royalty. Once you hit visit number three you’re family and we treat you as such. We help you find a place to fit in and put you to work. That, too, is hospitality. Every person wants to feel needed and a part of something bigger than themselves (Perry 10).

Weem described the importance and immediacy of involving newcomers in service and ministry:

In the past, people came to us. For many Protestant churches, the point of entry in the first half of the twentieth century was the Sunday school. In the second half of the century, the worship service became the first point of entry for most newcomers. The church’s goal for newcomers was membership, with the hope that giving and serving would follow for most. This process often moved fairly quickly since most new people already had church experience, frequently in the same denomination. New people understood how churches work and shared their beliefs. Today the sequence for many is the opposite, especially for the young. Serving may be their entry point, followed by a small group and then worship. Also, today, some will participate actively without joining, at least for a long while. Some may never join. They will probably not come based on thorough knowledge of our beliefs and values. That does not mean beliefs are unimportant, but rather that decisions about choosing a church are based far more on relationships and belonging (Weem).

Engaging newcomers through involvement and service requires a shift from being church-focused to being discipleship-focused. Though membership is part of the process of engagement, it should not be the goal. The goal is discipleship and a beginning point in discipleship is engaging the gifts, needs and passions of people. People need more than simple tasks and mundane work to do. They need opportunities to develop courage, service, love and sacrifice. When the church underutilizes people, it dampens the callings and aspirations of volunteers and limits any hope of maturing or advancing in discipleship (Schnase, *Just Say Yes* 35).

The Key to Engagement

Ultimately, the key to engagement is relationship. It is through relationships that people are brought to Christ and into the church. It is through relationships that people stay and continue to engage (Lawless 48; Schaller 74). Friendship with others, personal relationships, and personal care are essential for engaging and assimilating new members (Bocock ii; Hunter, *Celtic* 31; Rainer, *Book* 282). When guests and members are engaged, there are high levels of trust, respect, pride and commitment (Waltz, *First* 35). In its simplest form, “engagement is the process of relationship, not an end in itself” (Adams, *Just Exactly*).

Interpersonal Relationships

God hardwires the need to belong in the heart and soul of every person. The feeling that we do not belong can be very frustrating. For a new person who visits a church it can be especially disheartening. In “The Need to Belong,” Shawn Wood identified six things that are known about belonging: (1) Everyone has a desire to belong, (2) Most people need help belonging. (3) The pathway to belonging must be simple,

visible and repeatable. (4) When people feel like they belong they become contributing members of the group. (5) If the belonging itch is not scratched they will not hang around long. And, (6) God has trusted us with his most valuable possessions--people (Wood).

People are God's most valuable possessions. It is the calling and responsibility of every church to help people feel that they belong, so they can be connected to a relationship with God and experience transformation. (Wood)

When a guest visits a church, the underlying goal should be to connect with them relationally in a way that builds a bridge that opens the way for that person to experience and know Christ. Connecting and engaging with a guest "isn't about selling our church; it's about offering an authentic relationship and grace" (Farr and Kotan, *10 Prescriptions* 67).

Searcy recognized the important role that developing relationships have for new attendees. The development of relationships is the glue that encourages and causes second time guests to stick. Once relationships begin to form, churches offer new people responsibilities and opportunities for service. This effort allows new people to develop a sense of ownership, which is an essential element that precedes membership (Searcy 334-49). Searcy stated: "It doesn't matter how well you preach or how passionate your worship team, if your newcomers do not find relationships and take on responsibility within the church, they will not stay long" (Searcy 1094). It is important to recognize that every person has a need to feel both noticed and accepted before they are willing to make any sort of a personal investment. Therefore, it's critical that guests begin making connections with some familiar faces within the first few weeks (Tenny-Brittian, *Connection 1* 15).

According to Weem, churches that are reaching newcomers today understand the importance of quality relationships. They understand that people are more interested in what the church believes once they feel they belong. Because of this, churches are redefining the concept of assimilation to include engagement and relationship. The new goal of assimilation is not to have new people simply “fit in,” but to engage them in the life of the body and in relationship so that the church can experience the rich diversity of gifts that newer people bring. Today belonging tends to come before believing. Remembering this will help the church “not only welcome newcomers but will treat them with the dignity they deserve as children of God seeking to take their next step of discipleship” (Weem).

This way of thinking is clearly expressed by Kennon Callahan:

People come to a church longing for, yearning for, and hoping for this sense of roots, place, belonging, sharing, and caring. People come to a church in our time with a search for community, not committee. We make the mistake of assuming that, by putting people on a committee, they will develop ownership for the objectives of the church.

People are not looking for ownership of objectives or for functional, organizational, institutional goals. Their search is far more profound and desperate than that. They are looking for home, for relationships. They are looking for the profound depths of community (Callahan 106).

Every person needs a place where they know they belong. Joseph Myers in “*The Search to Belong*” confirmed the need for belonging and meaningful relationships. He wrote: “As we search to belong, we aren’t really looking for commitment. We simply want to connect.” Myers understands belonging as multidimensional and “people belong to us on different levels” (Myers 20). He described these different levels as special relationships: public, social, personal and intimate. It is in these four spatial relationships that people “develop personalities, culture, and communication” (Myer 20). Each of these

spaces is helpful, healthy and needed for people to feel they are part of a community. We connect and participate in all four spatial levels in differing degrees, some at a surface level and some significant. As human beings we find ourselves moving among these four places of belonging. Healthy community can happen in all four spaces. Myers states that we shouldn't be in a hurry to "push and pull people, trying to move them to the next level" thinking the earlier spaces are less significant (Myer 41). Relationships are needed at each level.

Belonging represents an important aspect of faith since the Christian calling involves a relationship with Christ. Belonging and believing contain inseparable qualities and both incorporate choice and obligation (Hux 29). "The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be the church" (Frazee 35). The significance of belonging and community in the church is crucial according to Larry Crabb:

The future of the church depends on whether it develops true community. We can get by for a while on size, skilled communication, and programs to meet every need, but unless we sense that we belong to each other; with masks off, the vibrant church of today will become the powerless church of tomorrow. Stale, irrelevant, a place of pretense where sufferers suffer alone, where pressure generates conformity rather than the Spirit creating life – that's where the church is headed unless it focuses on community (Crabb, in *Forward of The Connecting Church*, 13)

The church must cultivate a sense of belonging for all guests, new believers and for all new members. In order for this to happen, the church must provide friendship and community building opportunities because "the number of close friends a new member develops in the church has a direct influence on whether or not he or she continues as an active member" (Arn and Arn, 140-143). According to their research, Arn and Arn concluded that friendships are the single most important factor in retaining members (Arn

and Arn, 143). Friendship with others, personal relationships, and personal care are essential for assimilating new members (Bocock ii; McIntosh & Martin 75-86; Rainer, *Book* 282). The essence of new member assimilation is interconnectedness with others who feel comfortable and belong to the church (Searcy 30; Attebery 49, Rainer and Rainer 147; McIntosh, *Biblical* 75-86). Uniting new believers with other believers through church serves as the biblical means for church growth (McIntosh, *Biblical* 72). Rainer emphasized the need for personal relationships such as the sharing of meals in one's home over programs (Rainer, *Book* 282).

Patricia Obst and Naomi Tham recognize and identified the important role of identification. When an individual identifies with a church, a self-conception of belonging results in emotional value in the relationship and produces a “psychological sense of community” (Obst and Tham 345). These researchers concluded that a sense of belonging was more important than the other dimensions considered in their study. An individual's psychological sense of community and religiosity in relationship to church membership strengthens his or her wellbeing. Religiosity increased the longer an individual belonged to a church and contributed to a more developed sense of wellbeing and a psychological sense of community. Their study implies that membership supports and assists an individual's personal faith (Obst and Tham 350-59). Thus, relationships with others in the church play an important role in the development and discipleship of believers (Hux 28).

Sometimes those in the church forget how much the church really has to offer others. Schnase clearly identified what the church has that people need:

People need to know God loves them, that they are of supreme value, and that their life has significance. People need to know that they are not alone; that when

they face life's difficulties, they are surrounded by a community of grace; and that they do not have to figure out entirely for themselves how to cope with family tensions, self-doubts, periods of despair, economic reversal, and the temptations that hurt themselves or others. People need to know the peace that runs deeper than an absence of conflict, the hope that sustains them even through the most painful periods of grief, the sense of belonging that blesses them and stretches them and lifts them out of their own preoccupations. People need to learn how to offer and accept forgiveness and how to serve and be served. As a school for love, the church becomes a congregation where people learn from one another how to love. People need to know that life is not having something to live on but something to live for, that life comes not from taking for oneself but by giving of oneself. People need a sustaining sense of purpose (Schnase, "Radical").

Schaller stated it is "easier to become a member of the church than to feel accepted. Acceptance and a developed sense of belonging, however, emerge as key elements toward the retention and assimilation of new people (Schaller, *Assimilating* 73). Implicit in the church's responsibility of being hosts are the priorities of welcoming, guiding, informing, and assimilating (McIntosh, *Beyond* 19). Sadly, most churches are guilty of forfeiting this responsibility. This in turn hurts the growth of the church since 70-90 percent of the time a person chooses to attend a church because a friend or relative already attends. These existing relationships are a built-in means of future spiritual support that often goes unused (Hux 64). McIntosh concluded: "People stay in churches primarily because of relationships" (McIntosh, *Beyond* 25).

People need to connect with others in community. The old cliché that people aren't looking for just friendly churches but are looking for friends (relationships) proves to be true. This reminds us that it is not enough to be friendly. We must offer ourselves in authentic friendships/relationships (Farr and Kotan, *10 Prescriptions* 16-17).

Retention/Attrition

On any given Sunday, the mid-sized church will have one or more guests and visiting families. A family may be a senior adult couple, a single mother and her two-year

old daughter, a husband and wife and their three children, a middle-aged couple with a teenage son or a variety of other configurations. A family could be made up of one person or a dozen, but in each case, they come to church looking for something. For most, it is to encounter God in a faith community. For others, it may be to find friends who will support and encourage them in their season of life. For others, it is trying to find some direction or help for their life or for someone they care about. The reasons are as varied as the people. Yet, all of them come with the goal of finding: God, friendship, help, encouragement, healing, belonging, contribution, hope, and more.

The challenge for the church is to connect with that person or family to help them find the “something” they seek. People need to be needed and accepted. Their need for a sense of family and belonging is often what brings people to church in the first place. If they don’t find it in the first two or three visits, they will often move on. Those who do stay, often remain on the parameter of the congregation discontent and disconnected (Stewart 10).

Why do some people stay, and others leave? Why do some never return after the first visit? Why do others join the church membership, but don’t become engaged? Research has estimated that upwards of 75% of those who do not return will not go to any other church (Houts). This estimate brings to the forefront the vital nature of connecting with and caring for newcomers who may visit the church. For many of them, this may be the only chance for years or possibly for their lifetime that they can connect with a community of faith and find hope, healing and grace through Jesus Christ.

Connecting newcomers into the life, ministry and mission of the local church is the lifeblood of every congregation, but more than that, it is the lifeblood of that person

or family when it comes to their faith and eternal destiny. Churches that work to connect newcomers and regular members create in them a sense of belonging and do better at retaining individuals for the long term (Steward 10).

Churches should always seek the retention of guests as well as members. The reason is clear. Besides the Bible commissioning the believers to make disciples in all the nations, Christian people care about the spiritual wellbeing of all people (Harre 30). People come into the church in all sorts of ways. They come by visiting the church, biological growth, transfer of membership or conversion (McIntosh and Martin 9-10). People exit the church in a variety of ways: death, transfer or reversion. The goal of any church is to grow by retention and not decline by attrition. Churches with intentionally designed plans, processes, and procedures for the assimilation and discipleship of new converts have demonstrated the most effectiveness at attaining such goals (Hux 85). Lowe acknowledged an obvious retention problem and concluded that many churches lack active, well-designed, intentional plans to accomplish spiritual growth (Lowe 1). These plans, processes and procedures will not happen automatically. Churches must accept the responsibility for the assimilation and incorporation of new members into the body of the church. Church must also monitor the connections and participation of people to make sure this happens, especially during the first few months of attendance. If new people drop out of church, in most cases it is because the church has failed in its responsibility to help him or her grow in their relationship with God and become an active member (Arn and Arn 144; Scott 55-56). Larry Osborne identified the problem in many churches in retention by stating, "We've become so focused on reaching people

that we've forgotten the importance of keeping people" (Osborne 13). For Osborne, the church's back door required an intentional slamming shut (Osborne 15).

Follow-Up

One of the first steps in retention is a commitment to follow-up. The importance of follow-up cannot be underestimated. Churches need to obtain contact information from every guest. Searcy stressed that follow-up must be fast, friendly, and functional. The element of fast follow-up contains two phases. Effective follow-up happens post-service by presenting guests with a gift and thanking them for their visit. The second element of follow-up comes by way of e-mail. Searcy suggested that the church e-mail guests by Monday afternoon. This communication should express thanks, invite guests to return for another visit, and ask each to participate in a first-time-guest survey on the church's web site. Searcy stressed that the feedback from the survey provides the best communication and source of evaluation of the guest's first impression of the church as well as providing important information for the church to improve the guest experience (Searcy 665-748). A great first impression and effective follow-up will increase the odds of another visit by above 50 percent (Tenny-Brittian, *Connections 1* 15).

Paul Sorensen from Community Church of Joy reported, "Thirty-four percent of first-time guests who get a call from the pastor within two days will return next Sunday. But if they receive a call from a layperson, 68 percent will come back" (Sorensen 7).

Searcy stressed that the second-time visitor follow-up becomes just as important as first-time guest follow-up. This response again includes a thirty-six hour, email response (Searcy 913-31). This level of communication develops relationships that set the stage for developing friendships. Searcy stated that when guests return to their church,

the chances of gaining new regular attendees drastically increases by 80 percent, increasing the guest's chances and opportunities for beginning a journey with Christ (Searcy 105).

If churches ignore guests and new comers, they slip out of the back door. It is imperative that church members notice and include guests. Seventy percent of new people who become inactive do so in the first twelve months (Stutzman 67-89).

Why Guests Do and Do Not Return

According to Tenny-Brittian, the average church in the United States gets less than a 10 percent return rate on guests (Tenny-Brittian, *5 Critical Mistakes*). Giving a differing view, McIntosh wrote, "Church growth studies have found that the average growing church in the United States keeps 16 percent of all first-time guests. In contrast, the average church keeps 85 percent of its second-time guests! Thus a follow-up plan must focus on helping first-time guests return for a second visit" (McIntosh, *Beyond* 121).

Why do some guests return, and some don't? Many times, the reason relates to hospitality issues pertaining to how they were greeted, the condition of the facilities, the friendliness of the people, their worship experience and the sense of welcome they had. Tenny-Brittian stated that for many guests: "...the core reason they don't return is too often because they were hoping to find God and instead found the Church. In other words, they couldn't find God through the coded vocabulary, the insider-only message, and/or the spirit of conflict that smothered the Spirit of God" (Tenny-Brittian, *Connections I* 12).

A connection with the church is built on first impressions and overall experience. A great first impression won't necessarily turn a visitor into a guest, but a poor first impression most likely means they won't be back (Tenny-Brittian, *Connections 1* p15). In order for a visitor to want to return, they must make some sort of connection with the whole church experience in some way. This connection may be with the pastor or someone or group of people in a perceptible way, or it may be that the style and content of the worship service resonates within them (Tenny-Brittian, *Connections 1* 15).

Relationships Are Key

What causes people to assimilate into a church? It is relationship. The key to retention is to help guests establish relationships with people in the church and to move from being outsiders to being insiders. It is imperative that from the first visit that the church seeks to move them into active participation with others in the church (Ming). Searcy agreed that the development of relationships comprise the most effective adhesive for keeping guests (Searcy 991-92). Robert Jeambey reported that 43 percent of all people who leave congregations do so because of "nonacceptance and unrelatedness" (Jeambey).

Speaking to the importance of relationships to retention, Stan Toler and Alan Nelson stated:

I have been told that if a person does not make seven friendships in the first six months that they will leave. Before we can get people involved in ministry, we must assimilate them into the family. If they feel loved, needed, and respected, they will stay. In fact, statistics show that if a person returns three times there is a 90 percent chance that person will remain for some length of time, therefore those early impressions are vital for continued growth (Toler and Nelson 148).

Lawless listed four components of effective assimilation, developed through research at the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry at Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary: membership expectations, ministry involvement, convictional preaching, and relationships. Of these four components, Lawless emphasizes relationships, drawing conclusions from his data about the importance of relationships in his surveys (Lawless 48-49).

Steven Rose developed a project that used small groups in his church in an effort to retain people through genuine relationships and authentic discipleship. According to Rose, the small groups —effectively motivated and challenged people inside and outside of the church to participate in fellowship opportunities (Rose xi). Following the projects development, average attendance increased by 9 percent over the next two years, the number of adult small groups increased by 300 percent, and the number of adult disciples increased by 54.5 percent (Rose 133; Attebery 53-54). When guests or new Christians sees familiar faces and have friends in the church who help them build new relationships with others, a sense of belonging and assimilation takes place much more naturally (Scott 55-56). The goal for first-time guests is simply getting them to return. The goal for second-time guests is exposing them to opportunities to meet people, because relationships are the key for retention of members (Searcy 122).

Cultivating Relationships

The church must be intentional about building relationships (Ming). According to Rainer, Sunday school provides the most strategic venue for the cultivation of relationships for outreach and assimilation (Rainer, *Expectations* 173). When class members invited friends, relatives and coworkers to attend their classes, retention rates increased “dramatically,” leading to the conclusion that “When the Sunday school is the front door, the back door closes tightly” (Rainer, *Expectations* 47; Searcy 991-92). Rainer

listed the following ministries taking place in Sunday schools, as indicated in the survey responses of participating churches: teaching, care group, evangelism and outreach, hospitality, leadership and organizational, and prayer. These ministries meet needs within the group and encourage intentional outreach to unbelievers. In addition, these ministries provide places of service so that members can use their gifts in ministry. Contrasting these opportunities with the limitations of “the small-group movement,” Rainer asserts, “no organization in America today provides more opportunities for ministry than the Sunday school” (Rainer, *Expectations* 39).

Rainer shared his findings as to the significance of the pastor’s role in making Sunday school the most effective assimilation program of the church stating:

We observed that the effective Sunday schools had strong and vocal support from the pastor. Indeed, it was often the pastor who spoke most often about the importance of Sunday school. He did not leave the emphasis in the hands of a minister of education or Sunday school director alone (Rainer, *Expectations* 171).

Communicating Expectations

Churches with the greatest new member retention rate are those which expect their members to fulfill the responsibilities communicated during the process of joining the church (George, *Assimilating* 101; Rainer, *Expectations* 6-7, 23). McIntosh encouraged church leaders to develop strategic “pathways of belonging,” which he defined as “strategically designed ministries that assist new people in gaining a sense of being part of your church” (McIntosh, *Beyond* 132). These pathways serve as invitations to the guest to move from visiting into identifying with the church’s vision, values and ministry (McIntosh, *Beyond* 133) He proposed as one of the pathways an “orientation class.” McIntosh distinguished this class from a new member class in that its purpose is to “introduce people to your church culture, rather than stressing membership” (McIntosh

Beyond 133). Rainer said, "...the relationship between assimilation effectiveness and new member classes is amazing" (Rainer, *Expectations* 105). Rainer's study indicated an increased rate of retention among churches that offered a new member class in contrast with those which did not. The data further indicated higher rates of retention in churches which not only offer a membership class, but which require participation in the class as a condition of membership (Rainer, *Expectations* 103-105). The also data showed another increase in retention rate is linked to covenant membership where churches that require a signed covenant for new members show growth exceeding churches that did not require a covenant (Rainer, *Expectations* 63). Rainer commented, "Churches that effectively close the back door typically have members who can articulate most of the purposes of the church" (Rainer, *Expectations* 172; Rainer, *Surprising* 113-115). On the other hand, Rainer pointed out that a church which communicated little or no expectation of a new member's commitment level were "much more likely to lose members to transfer or inactivity than a high-expectation church" (Rainer, *Expectations* 106). Rainer believed the lack of understanding of the church's mission is a contributing cause to membership attrition (Rainer, *Expectations* 147). Stetzer and Dodson agreed and discovered that 53% of "comeback churches," churches that revitalized after decline, used new membership classes as a means to raise membership requirements (Stetzer and Dodson 124-125).

In high retention churches offering such a membership class, Rainer noted, "The pastor is the primary teacher in the new member class. Though his schedule is among the busiest, he sees this class as a primary opportunity to establish the vision and expectations, and to at least meet people before they join" (Rainer, *Expectations* 116). Pastors of high retention churches also use their exposure to the congregation during

worship services as a platform for communicating the value and expectations of membership as well as the assimilation process (Rainer, *Expectations* 20).

Active Involvement

Friendships alone aren't enough to take a participating member to the committed level. Many, if not most, participating members who have not made a missional connection to the church leave when the going gets rough or uncomfortable (Tenny-Brittian, *Connections* 2 15). Therefore, to get first-time guests to return, you must have a good product, and you must get them involved quickly to move them beyond being just a consumer to becoming a producer. What accelerates growth is closing this gap quickly. "In fast-growing churches, the process begins even before the guest arrives and is intentionally continued immediately following the guest's first visit" (Ozier and Haworth 10).

Describing what he called "the primary conclusion and thesis" of his study, Rainer summarized, "Effective assimilation churches have one primary characteristic that sets them apart from churches that do not keep their members in active involvement" (Rainer, *Expectations* 23). Get them involved in ministry and they are much more likely to stay (Ranier, *Surprising* 124). The proverbial closing of the back door may be described as simply keeping members in the church, active and fulfilled (Rainer, *Book* 281).

When churches procrastinate in assimilating new believers, they increase the attrition rate. Getting new members involved in service while the "fire is still hot" acts to prevent later trends of noninvolvement (Lawless 43). Unless attended to, the newly-saved

may also quickly settle into a pew, where they sit and sour until the second coming (Attebery 43).

As mentioned earlier in this review, 80% of the people who leave a church do so within the first six months of their membership (Lawless 45). Therefore, it is important for churches to realize that time is of the essence when seeking to mobilize new members into ministry. Lawless interpreted this phenomenon as stemming directly from the new member's lack of relationships and responsibilities in the church (Lawless 45). George Hunter also acknowledged this paradigm. Some churches receive numerous people into the membership, but virtually the same number become inactive. Analysis reveals that churches with an interest in numerical growth but not internal development fail to assimilate their new people, limiting their ability to sustain growth (Hunter, *Celtic* 33). The cause, said Hunter, for the inactive member problem is more often poor assimilation than any other factor (Hunter, *Church* 164).

Things Have to Change

For a church to become a vibrant, fruitful, growing congregation a change of attitudes, practices, and values is required. Good intentions are not enough. Schnase stated, "Too many churches want more young people as long as they act like old people, more newcomers as long as they act like old-timers, more children as long as they are as quiet as adults, more ethnic families as long as they act like the majority in the congregation" (Schnase, *Radical*). Affirming this problem, Schaller stated, "Too often congregations, by their actions, attitudes, and traditions, tend to cause people to stay away completely or to cause the church-shoppers to continue looking elsewhere for a new church home" (Schaller 69). Schaller revealed that most congregations fail to

discover why individuals leave their church. Those churches that sought a response from parting individuals discover that most leave because they felt the inner circle was impenetrable. For many churches the responsibility for a new person entering into the inner circle and the discovery of a sense of belonging remains with the new attendee (Schaller 82-83).

Guests return for two reasons: One reason is that they liked it! They had a good experience. Or, in business nomenclature, they enjoyed a good product. This first reason is a must for a church to grow. This is what generates growth. The second reason people return is that they get involved. This mutually beneficial relationship is what accelerates growth in both the church and the new member. It is the relationships and friendships that develop when people are “doing things together” that foster “connections” that lead to growth (Ozier and Haworth 10).

The challenge is for the church to reach into and through generations to connect with, evangelize, assimilate, and disciple newcomers of all ages from entrance into a church and to engagement in the Christian faith one person at a time (Bonifacio).

Research Design Literature

This review of the literature has outlined the biblical, theological and literary foundations for the care, engagement and assimilation of guests and newcomers into the life and mission of the church. The review of literature provided a broad spectrum of insight into guest experience from practitioners and theorists.

The methodology used in this study was a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approach. The goal was to identify and understand the underlying attitudes, values and motivations of guests and new attendees and to offer insight into the problems

of guest experiences. The pre-intervention nature of the project was to identify, describe and evaluate factors that contribute to encouraging and discouraging experiences of guests when they first attend a church.

The main instrument used in the project was a researcher designed web-based survey for pastors and new attendee participants of selected churches. The pastor and guest survey sought to identify the experiences that engage or disengage guests when they first attend a church. Survey questions for pastor and new attendee participants were based on the same framework but then adapted based on their differing roles and experiences. Focus groups of selected new attendees and personal interviews of selected pastors were employed using open-ended questions that probe into personal experiences, feelings and perspectives. All questions were based on the research questions and purpose of this project.

Summary of Literature

On any given Sunday, the mid-sized church will have one or more guest families. They come to church looking for God, friendship, help, encouragement, healing, belonging, contribution, hope, and more.

The challenge for the church is to connect with that person or family to help them find what they are looking for. Yet too often a person or family will only attend church service that one time, never to return. Why?

Connecting newcomers into the life, ministry and mission of the local church is vital for every congregation, but more than that, it is vital for the person or family when it comes to their faith and eternal destiny. Yet programs to connect with newcomers do not

occur on their own. Effective programs are intentionally planned, faithfully executed and regularly evaluated.

The changing cultural and generational influences upon the church in a postmodern world show a growing disparity between societal and biblical values. The differences between the generational divisions of builders, boomers, busters, bridgers, millennials and the iGeneration are vast and challenging. Yet, the importance of winning the lost to Christ and engaging them in the church to grow and serve as disciples is as great today as any time in history. The challenge is for the church to reach into and through generations to connect them to others in the church, build relationships beyond Sundays, encourage a personal profession of faith and involve them in discipleship experiences that prompts them to become fully developing members of the congregation (Bonifacio; Searcy 105).

Intentional engagement and assimilation guests and newcomers is crucial for the fulfillment of the Great Commission that Jesus has given his church. Whether it be a Christian who is moving into a new community and seeking a church to attend or an unchurched or once-churched family stepping through the church doors in search of some connection with God, hope, healing or fellowship, the church is called to open its doors and hearts to welcome them in. To neglect even the simplest practices of hospitality can cause unnecessary barriers that could block a person's ability to clearly hear the message a church is seeking to proclaim. Engagement and assimilation deals with welcoming the new family, not just as visitor, but as the brothers and sisters in Christ who have been expected. Most importantly, it is showing the love of Christ, preparing the way for the hearing of the Word of God, and brings glory to God. Intentional engagement and

assimilation of guests and new attendees prepares the way for effective evangelism and the realization of the Great Commission.

Church engagement does not comprise the final test whether a person is fully devoted disciple of Christ, but it does help in gauging and reflecting a level of commitment of the person in regards to the vision, values and mission of a local church. The ultimate engagement and assimilation for those in Christ is the new heaven and the new earth. In this glorious location every believer will proclaim, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen” (Revelation 1:5, NIV).

Project Overview

This chapter presented the biblical and theological foundations of the study and reviewed current literature pertinent to the dissertation project. Chapter 3 details the methodology and context for the study as well as the collection and analysis of the data collected through surveys, focus groups and interviews. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the data analysis gathered in this study. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the study, including an evaluation and interpretation of the findings, and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter describes the analytical framework used for this project. The nature and purpose of the project is explained followed by a detailed description of the research questions upon which this project is based. The context of the project is the mid-sized Church of the Nazarene located in the four state region of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. The chapter describes the participants, the procedure of collecting data through the instrumentation of web-based surveys, focus groups and personal interviews, as well as the methods of data analysis used in the project.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

On any Sunday, the mid-sized church will have one or more guests. The challenge for the church is the kind of experience that guest has when visiting. Is their experience positive and encouraging for them to come back a second time or get engaged in some group or some church ministry? Or, is their experience negative and discouraging, influencing them to not come back again or engage with the church in any way further?

The purpose of this research project is to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in mid-sized Nazarene churches. The goal of the study was to help churches create more positive experiences and reduce negative experiences for new attendees so as to provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return, encounter the life-transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and engage in the life and mission of the church.

Research Questions

Four research questions were formulated and provided the basis for identifying the primary experiences that either encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in the mid-sized Church of the Nazarene and how a church may improve the guest experience. (See Appendix A.) The research questions were addressed through the use of three instruments: surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The surveys consisted of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions. On selected quantitative questions a Likert scale was used for participants to evaluate different components of church facilities, programs, and hospitality.

Research Question #1 (RQ1)

What are the strategies and practices that churches actively utilize to retain new attendees?

To answer RQ1, two qualitative questions were created for pastor interview questions. First, “what does your church do in order to welcome first-time guests?” Second, “what are the strategies and practices that your church actively uses to encourage guests to return?”(See Appendix J.) The responses to these focus groups and interview questions were then compared and contrasted with what guests experienced when they came to a church.

Research Question #2 (RQ2)

What are the experiences that new church attendees have that encourage ongoing attendance and engagement?

This question was addressed in surveys, focus groups of guests and interviews of pastors. The pastor survey contained two quantitative and two qualitative questions

probed the pastor's perceptions of positive guest experiences. (See Appendix E.) First, pastors were asked to evaluate the experience a first-time guest might have at the pastor's church. The question was, "To what extent do you think their experience or impression as a guest is negative or positive in each of the following areas?" Pastors were then asked to make a choice between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive, and not applicable to measure their experience or impression. Categories included: church signage, clearly identified entrance, guest parking, parking lot greeters, door greeters, welcome desk/area, sanctuary greeters/ushers, music, sermon general, sense of welcome, access to information, accessibility to restrooms, friendliness of people to the guest, friendliness of people to each other, friendliness of the pastor, cleanliness of the facility, inside signage, children's check-in, nursery, preschool area, preschool care/classes, children's area, children's classes, youth area, youth classes, adult classes, visitor gift, welcome letter/email, personal contact by a pastor, personal contact by a church member, overall experience. Second, pastors were asked, "How influential or important do you think the following areas are to the positive experience of a guest at your church?" Participants were asked to make a choice between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important, and not applicable to measure their opinion. Areas of evaluation included were the same as the first question. Third, pastors were asked, "What experience do you think is the most encouraging to a guest?" Fourth, pastors were asked, "If a guest returns to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why?"

The guest survey contained two quantitative and two qualitative questions that probed positive guest experiences. (See Appendix H.) First, guests were asked, "Please evaluate your experience as a first-time guest at the Church of the Nazarene within the

past six months. To what extent was your experience or impression as a guest negative or positive in each of the following areas?” Participants were asked to make a choice between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive, and not applicable to measure their experience or impression. Areas included: door greeters, welcome desk/area, sanctuary greeters/ushers, music, sermon general, sense of welcome, access to information, accessibility to restrooms, friendliness of people to the guest, friendliness of people to each other, friendliness of the pastor, cleanliness of the facility, inside signage, children’s check-in, nursery, preschool area, preschool care/classes, children's area, children's classes, youth area, youth classes, adult classes, visitor gift, welcome letter/email, personal contact by a pastor, personal contact by a church member, overall experience. Second, guests were asked, “How influential or important are the following areas to you and your experience as a guest at the church?” Participants were asked to make a choice between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important, and not applicable to measure their opinion. Areas included were the same as the first question. Third, guests were asked, “What experience stood out as the most encouraging to you?” Fourth, the guests were asked, “How could the church improve the guest experience?”

One question in the pastor interviews examined positive guest experiences. “What do you think would be considered encouraging experiences that guests would have when they visit your church?” (See Appendix J.)

RQ2 was also addressed in the new attendee focus group and interview with two questions. First, “what is an example of an encouraging experience you had when you first visited this church?” Second, “for those of you who are still attending this church,

what kept you here? What experience(s) did you have that encouraged your ongoing engagement with the church?” (See Appendix I.)

Research Question #3 (RQ3)

What are the experiences that new church attendees have that discourage ongoing attendance and engagement?

The pastor’s survey contained one quantitative and two qualitative questions created to probe the pastor’s perceptions of negative guest experiences. (See Appendix J.) First, “please evaluate the experience a first-time guest might have at your church. To what extent do you think their experience or impression as a guest is negative or positive in each of the following areas?” Participants were asked to make a choice between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive, and not applicable to measure their experience or impression. Categories included: church signage, clearly identified entrance, guest parking, parking lot greeters, door greeters, welcome desk/area, sanctuary greeters/ushers, music, sermon general, sense of welcome, access to information, accessibility to restrooms, friendliness of people to the guest, friendliness of people to each other, friendliness of the pastor, cleanliness of the facility, inside signage, children’s check-in, nursery, preschool area, preschool care/classes, children’s area, children’s classes, youth area, youth classes, adult classes, visitor gift, welcome letter/email, personal contact by a pastor, personal contact by a church member, overall experience. Second, “what experience, if any, do you think could be the most discouraging to a guest?” Third, “if a guest does not return to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why not?”

The guest survey contained one quantitative and two qualitative questions that probed negative guest experiences. (See Appendix H.) First, “please evaluate your experience as a first-time guest at the Church of the Nazarene within the past six months. To what extent was your experience or impression as a guest negative or positive in each of the following areas?” Participants were asked to make a choice between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive, and not applicable to measure their experience or impression. Areas included: door greeters, welcome desk/area, sanctuary greeters/ushers, music, sermon general, sense of welcome, access to information, accessibility to restrooms, friendliness of people to the guest, friendliness of people to each other, friendliness of the pastor, cleanliness of the facility, inside signage, children’s check-in, nursery, preschool area, preschool care/classes, children's area, children's classes, youth area, youth classes, adult classes, visitor gift, welcome letter/email, personal contact by a pastor, personal contact by a church member, overall experience. Second, “what experience, if any, stood out as the most discouraging to you?” Third, “If NO” (the guest did not visit the church again), “what would you say is the most significant reason why?”

One question in the pastors’ interviews examined why a newcomer might not return for a second visit. “What could be a discouraging experience that a newcomer might have that could discourage them from returning or further engaging with your church?” (See Appendix J.)

Two questions in the new attendee focus group and interviews addressed RQ3. (See Appendix I.) “What discouraging experience(s), if any, did you have that you had to

overcome? Have you had discouraging experiences in other churches you have visited?

If so, what happened?”

Research Question #4 (RQ4)

What are the most effective strategies and practices that the mid-sized church can utilize to retain new attendees?

The pastor survey contained four quantitative and three qualitative questions created to help identify effective strategies and practices for positive guest experiences. (See Appendix E.) First, “how influential or important do you think the following areas are to the positive experience of a guest at your church?” Participants were asked to make a choice between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important, and not applicable to measure their opinion. Areas of evaluation included: church signage, clearly identified entrance, guest parking, parking lot greeters, door greeters, welcome desk/area, sanctuary greeters/ushers music, sermon, general sense of welcome, access to information, accessibility to restrooms, friendliness of people to the guest, friendliness of people to each other, friendliness of the pastor, cleanliness of the facility, inside signage, children’s check-in, nursery, preschool area, preschool care/classes, children's area, children's classes, youth area, youth classes, adult classes, visitor gift, welcome letter/email, personal contact by a pastor, personal contact by a church member, overall experience. Second, “what percentage of guests come to your church based on the following influences?” Participants were asked to rate each of the following items based on percentage: invited by a friend, invited by a relative, word of mouth, the church website, church signage/marquee, church advertisement, the church building, the pastor, living near the church, attending a special event, attending a small group, social media,

other. Third, “what percentage of guests come to your church with the following church experiences?” Participants were asked to rate each of the following experiences based on percentage: lifelong participant in church, attend only on holidays, have not been going for some time, never been to church, started attending after married, started attending after having children, started attending after a crisis, been hurt in a church, looking for a new church, other. Fourth, “after guests visit the church and do not return, what percentage do you think visit another church?” Participants were asked to answer this question by indicating their response on a scale of 0 to 100%. Fifth, “how could your church improve the guest experience?” Sixth, “if a guest returns to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why?” Seventh, “if a guest does not return to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why not?” Space was also given for additional comments.

The guest survey contained four quantitative and seven qualitative questions that focused on possible strategies and practices that can promote positive guest experiences. (See Appendix H.) First, “how influential or important are the following areas to you and your experience as a guest at the church?” Participants were asked to make a choice between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important and not applicable to measure their opinion. Areas included: door greeters, welcome desk/area, sanctuary greeters/ushers, music, sermon general, sense of welcome, access to information, accessibility to restrooms, friendliness of people to the guest, friendliness of people to each other, friendliness of the pastor, cleanliness of the facility, inside signage, children’s check-in, nursery, preschool area, preschool care/classes, children’s area, children’s classes, youth area, youth classes, adult classes, visitor gift, welcome letter/email,

personal contact by a pastor, personal contact by a church member, overall experience.

Second, “what most influenced you to come to this church in the first place?” Participants were asked to select one of the following categories: invited by a friend, invited by a relative, word of mouth, the church website, church signage/marquee, church advertisement, the church building, the pastor, I live nearby, I attended a special event, I attended a small group, other. Third, “before coming to this church, what was your Church Experience?” Participants were asked to mark all that apply. Categories included: lifelong participant in church, attend only on holidays, haven’t been going for some time, never been to church, started attending after married, started attending after having children, started attending after a crisis, been hurt in a church, looking for a new church, other. Fourth, “how could the church improve the guest experience?” Fifth, “after your first visit, did you visit the church again?” Sixth, “after your first visit, did you visit another church?” Seventh, “if you did visit the church again, are you still attending?” Eighth, “if YES, what would you say is the most significant reason why?” Ninth, “if NO, what would say is the most significant reason why not?” Tenth, “would you recommend this church to your family and friends?” Eleventh, space was also given for additional comments not covered by the survey.

Two questions in the Pastor interviews examined this issue. (See Appendix J.) First, “for those who are new to your church over the previous six months, what do you think, kept them there? What were the positive experiences they had that encouraged ongoing engagement with your church?” Second, “what have been the most effective strategies and practices that your church has utilized that have resulted in guests returning?”

The new attendee focus group questions addressed RQ4. (See Appendix I.) “First, what brought you to this church the first time you visited?” Second, “what discouraging experience(s), if any, did you have that you had to overcome?” Third, “have you had discouraging experiences in other churches you have visited? If so, what happened? For those of you who are still attending this church, what kept you here?” Fourth, “what experience(s) did you have that encouraged your ongoing engagement with the church?”

Ministry Context for Observing the Phenomenon

The ministry context for this research project was the mid-sized Church of the Nazarene that averaged 250 to 999 in morning worship attendance. The demographic area of focus for this study was limited to Churches of the Nazarene in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma.

There are several reasons for selecting the ministry context and demographic area as the focus for this project. First, most mid-sized churches have multiple guests visit their church throughout the year. These guests may be relatives or friends of congregants, newcomers to the area, individuals or families looking for a new church home, or someone just passing through. The assumption was that the mid-sized church would have a significant number of guests who attended their church in the previous six months who could be potential participants in the guest survey. Second, the geographic area of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma was selected due to its proximity to the researcher. This four state area is divided into seven districts in the Church of the Nazarene. This allowed the researcher greater ability to travel to selected areas for focus groups and personal interviews as needed. Third, the Church of the Nazarene was selected because this was the denomination of which the researcher was part as a pastor.

The assumption of the researcher was that pastors in the same denomination and in similar sized churches would be more apt to participate in the pastor's survey, pastor's focus groups and send the guest survey invitation email to guests who had visited their church within the past six months.

Participants Sampled About the Phenomenon

Criteria for Selection

Participating churches were selected from statistical data through the Nazarene Research Center in Lenexa, Kansas. All of the data used were public records. Statistical data from 2016 annual church reports indicated a total of 504 Nazarene churches were in the four state area of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. A list was created of all mid-sized Nazarene churches which had an average worship attendance of 250 to 999 people. The list contained 35 potential participating churches. The churches were located in a variety of community settings: suburban, urban, small town and rural. Following the identification of potential churches, the senior pastor of each church was contacted by email and invited to participate in the research project. (See Appendix B.)

By email, the pastor of the church that the guests visited invited the guests to participate in the research project. Guest and pastor focus groups were randomly selected from those who indicated their interest in participating on the final survey question.

Description of Participants

Two categories of participants were chosen to participate in the research study. The first category was a senior or lead pastor of the selected churches. There were two ways a pastor could participate. One was by taking the online pastor survey. The second way was to participate in a pastors' personal interview. The number of pastors was linked

to the number of churches invited to participate in the study. The second category of participation was a guest or new attendee who had visited a worship service at one of the participating churches sometime within the previous six months. There were two ways a guest or new attendee could participate. One was by taking the online guest survey. The other way to participate was to be part of a new attendee focus group. The number of participants was linked to the number of guests or new attendees that visited each church during the sampling period. Guest and new attendee participants were male or female adults over the age of 18. The actual number of participants was based on the number of guests and new attendees who were invited to participate by the respective churches and who responded to the email invitation and took the online survey. Focus group participation was limited to pastors and new attendees who indicated their desire to participate in the last question on the online survey.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent forms were used for the introductory page to the pastor survey and the guest survey. (See Appendices D and G.) Confidentiality in the surveys was insured by the exclusion of any name-identifying questions or data collection. The only identifying area in the online survey involved a participant's personal contact information (name, church, phone number, best time to call and email address) that they themselves typed in the space on the survey, if they chose to participate further through a pastor's or new attendee's focus group. There was no attempt to identify individual participants or their responses in the surveys.

Confidentiality was insured in the focus groups by meeting in a private location. Though a list of participants signed an attendance form at each focus group, there was no

attempt to identify individual remarks or responses in the focus groups. The roster of names was kept private in the researcher's possession for the duration of the study. As a result, pastors, staff members, and church leaders of participating churches could benefit from newcomers' responses concerning their church guest experience, without knowing which or any of their guests may have participated in the survey, focus groups.

All data pertaining to surveys, focus groups and interviews was stored in a secure location and digital recordings were maintained in password protected digital files. The data is presented in aggregate form, and none of the identities of any of the participants has been disclosed to any party besides myself.

There was no cost involved for participants to take part in the online survey focus groups or interviews other than their time to participate. Focus group and interview participants may have had incurred a cost related to their travel and their time participating.

Pilot Test

A group of six individuals, made up of non-participating pastors, pastoral staff members and lay leaders, pilot tested the web-based pastor survey and guest survey to check for content validity and functionality. Based on this pilot testing some of the questions were revised or reworded for clarification and ease of understanding. The pilot test also provided input and help in standardizing the wording of questions and Likert item statements in the surveys. The pilot group also reviewed the pastor and new attendee focus group questions. As a result, some questions were reworded, and an additional question was added.

Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants

The type of research model used in this study was pre-intervention. The focus of the project was to identify and describe the primary experiences that guests have when they first come into a church that encourage or discourage further engagement in the church. By evaluating and analyzing these experiences, insight and understanding can be gained to help churches create more positive experiences and reduce negative experiences for guests and new attendees so as to provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return, engage in the life of the church and encounter the life-transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The methodology used in this research project was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the web-based surveys and qualitative in the focus groups and interviews of pastors and guests. (See Table 3.1.) Qualitative methods used include open-ended questions in surveys and semi-structured focus groups and interviews. “Qualitative research produces culturally specific and contextually rich data critical for the design, evaluation and ongoing health of institutions like churches” (Sensing 58). Quantitative methods used include forced choice questions, demographic questions and generating numerical data from responses in the surveys. The goal of employing a mixed method was to identify and understand the contributing factors, underlying attitudes, values and motivations that influence the types of experiences that guests and new attendees have, the meaning they attribute to them and to offer insights into how to address them.

Table 3.1 Qualitative or Quantitative Questions

What Instrument Questions were Quantitative or Qualitative?				
	Pastor Survey	Guest Survey	Pastor Interviews	New Attendee Focus Group
Quantitative	2-7,11-13, 16-21	2-3,7-11, 14-19		
Qualitative	8-10,14-15, 22-24	4-6,12-13, 20-21	1-6	1-5

The main instruments used were researcher designed web-based surveys for pastors and guest participants of the selected churches. (See Appendices E and H.) Interviews of pastors and focus groups of new attendees from participating churches were also employed. (See Appendices J and I.) The content of the survey and focus group discussions were based on the research questions and responded to the intent of the purpose and rationale of this project. The pastor survey and the guest survey were based on the same design and questions. The only difference was that the pastor survey was adapted to examine their thoughts, impressions and assumptions related to guest experiences rather than their experience as a guest. Both surveys were administered by Nazarene Research Services using the SurveyGizmo.com survey platform.

Pastor and Guest Surveys

The invitation of pastors to participate in the research project began with a personal phone call from the researcher. Phone messages were left for many of the pastors who could not be reached. The researcher then sent a personal email addressed to each pastor briefly explaining the project and inviting their participation. Then an introductory email was sent to pastors of selected churches by Nazarene Research Services. The email described the study and invited their participation. (See Appendix B.)

The pastor was invited to go to the online pastor survey by clicking the link in the email. The introductory page of the survey was an informed consent form containing additional information about the study. (See Appendix D.) The participant was asked to indicate his or her consent to take part in the study or not. If consent was given, they were to mark "Yes, I consent to participate in the study", type in their signature and then click "NEXT". This took them to the first page of survey questions. If they did not wish to participate, they marked "No, I do not wish to participate" and then clicked "NEXT". This choice took them to a page that stated: "Thank you for your consideration. If you decide to change your mind, simply use the link in the email to start a new survey. You may now close this window or navigate to a new page." This was a forced-choice answer. If they did not click "Yes, I consent to participate in the study" then they could not access or participate in the survey.

The first section of questions on the pastor survey related to local church attendance information. The second section was a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. Quantitative questions used a forced choice five-point Likert scale: negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive, and N/A (Not Applicable). Qualitative questions asked for participant's written responses. The third section asked demographic questions related to the participant (gender, marital status, age category, children in the home, and type of community). The final question asked whether the participant would be willing to participate in a focus group. If so, they filled in their contact information. At the end of the survey the participant was then directed to click, "Submit." This choice submitted their completed survey and took them to a page that stated: "Thank you for taking our survey! Your confidential responses will provide

valuable help in our study of positive and negative guest experiences of first-time guests.”

As part of the pastor’s introductory email, the pastor was asked if they would send out an email to all guests who had visited their church within the past six months inviting them to participate in the research study by taking a guest survey. A guest email invitation template was included. They were asked to copy and paste the text of the guest email into an email from the church and send it out to each guest who had visited their church within the past six months.

The guest email gave a brief introduction to the research project and invited the guest to participate in the study by taking an online guest survey about their guest experience at the church. (See Appendix F.) The guest was invited to go to the online guest survey by clicking the link in the email. The introductory page of the survey was an informed consent form containing additional information about the study. The participant was asked to indicate his or her consent to take part in the study or not. (See Appendix G.) If consent was given, they were to mark "Yes, I consent to participate in this study", type in their signature and then click “NEXT”. This took them to the first page of survey questions. If they did not wish to participate, they were to mark "No, I do not wish to participate" and then click "NEXT". This choice took them to a page that stated: "Thank you for your consideration. If you decide to change your mind, simply use the link in the email to start a new survey. You may now close this window or navigate to a new page." This was forced-choice answer. If they did not click "Yes, I consent to participate in the study" then they could not access or participate in the survey.

The first section of questions on the guest survey was a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. Quantitative questions used a forced choice Likert scale: negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive, and N/A (Not Applicable). Qualitative questions asked for participant's written responses. The second section asked demographic questions related to the participant (gender, marital status, age category, children in the home and type of community). The final question asked whether the participant would be willing to participate in a focus group. If so, they filled in their contact information. At the end of the survey the participant was directed to click, "Submit." This choice submitted their completed survey and took them to a page that stated: "Thank you for taking our survey! Your confidential responses will provide valuable help in our study of positive and negative guest experiences of first-time guests."

One month after the initial email invitation sent by Nazarene Research Services, a follow up email was sent to each pastor who had not yet responded. (See Appendix C.) They were once again invited to participate by taking the survey themselves and by sending an invitation to their recent guest to participate in the guest survey. One month after this, a second follow up email was sent by Nazarene Research Service to all remaining pastors who had not responded. The researcher also sent out a personal email thanking all of the pastors who had participated and encouraging those who had not to consider doing so.

New Attendee Focus Groups

Focus groups of new attendees were held in private locations. Participants agreed verbally to maintain confidentiality of the conversations in the group. The focus groups

were semi-structured (Sensing 107). The questions asked were open ended. (See Appendix I.) The goal of the focus groups was to understand better the guest experiences of participants and the meaning they attribute to the experiences. Responses were digitally recorded after permission was granted by the participants and later transcribed by the researcher to provide a verbatim record of the responses. Handwritten notes were also taken during the focus groups to record any physical movements or inflections that were not captured by the digital recording.

Data collected in the New Attendees Focus Groups included basic demographic information (gender, age range, length of time attending current church, current church involvement) and responses to the following discussion questions: (1) What brought you to this church the first time you visited? (2) What is an example of an encouraging experience you had when you first visited this church? (3) What discouraging experience(s), if any, did you have that you had to overcome? (4) Have you had discouraging experiences in other churches you have visited? If so, what happened? (5) For those of you who are still attending this church, what kept you here? What experience(s) did you have that encouraged your ongoing engagement with the church?

Pastor Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted with selected pastors in the subject group by telephone. The interviews were semi-structured (Sensing 107). The questions asked were open ended. (See Appendix J.) Responses were digitally recorded after permission was granted by the participants and later transcribed by the researcher to provide a verbatim record of the responses. Handwritten notes were also taken during the interviews to record thoughts and ideas concerning the interviews.

Data collected in the Pastors Focus Group included basic demographic information (Gender, Age Range, Length of Current Pastorate) and responses to the following discussion questions: (1) What do you think would be considered encouraging experiences that a guest would have when they visit your church? (2) What could be a discouraging experience that a newcomer might have that could discourage them from returning or further engaging with your church? (3) For those who are new to your church over the previous six months, what do you think, kept them there? What were the positive experiences they had that encouraged ongoing engagement with your church? (4) What does your church do in order to welcome first-time guests? (5) What are the strategies and practices that your church actively utilizes to encourage guests to return? (6) What have been the most effective strategies and practices that your church has utilized that have resulted in guests returning?

Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected

Analyzing the data of the three distinct instruments used in data collection was done in a multi-method framework of “themes, slippage, and silences” (Sensing 197). Themes refers to areas of organization where there is significant overlap of themes or patterns. Slippage refers to areas of disagreement and incongruence. Silence refers to the question of what is left unsaid by the data that needs to be examined (Sensing 197-205). All data acquired through the online surveys, focus groups and interviews were analyzed and categorized by the research question addressed.

Table 3.2. Research Questions Addressed by Each Instrument

How each Research Question was addressed by each Instrument Question?				
	Pastor Survey	Guest Survey	Pastor Interviews	New Attendee Focus Group
RQ1	-	-	4,5	-
RQ2	6-8,14	2-4,6,12	1	2,5
RQ3	6,9,15	2,5,13	2	3,4
RQ4	7,10-15, 22	3,6-14,20	3,6	1,3-5
Demographics	2-5,16-21	15-19,21	Introduction	Introduction

Surveys

The pastor survey and guest survey were administered by Nazarene Research Services through SurveyGizmo.com. The SurveyGizmo.com survey platform insured consistency and validity in data collection and analysis. All data collected from the pastor survey and the guest survey was analyzed, organized and arranged into a reportable format through SurveyGizmo.com. Written responses from participants for each qualitative question were coded, categorized and arranged into a reportable format. The analyzed data was made available to the researcher from SurveyGizmo.com through a secure web link.

Focus Groups

Digital recorded audio data from focus groups was transcribed by the researcher, organized, and arranged into a reportable format using Microsoft Word and Excel spreadsheets. It was then coded for differences and similarities. Any handwritten notations recorded during the focus groups were reviewed and referenced for clarification and interpretation. Demographic information about the participants was gathered at the

beginning of each focus group. The main questions were qualitative in nature. For new attendee participants the questions focused on their personal experiences as guests.

Interviews

Digital recorded audio data of pastor interviews was transcribed by the researcher. The data was coded for differences and similarities, organized and arranged into a reportable format using Microsoft Word and Excel spreadsheets. Any handwritten notations recorded during the interviews were reviewed and referenced for clarification.

Synthesis

The collected data from the surveys, focus groups and interviews was analyzed to assess overlap in patterns and themes, points of disagreement and any exceptions or omissions exposed in the research. The data was examined and analyzed to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in Nazarene churches. The data was also analyzed for direct or indirect identification of strategies and practices that could help churches create more positive guest experiences, and in turn, may encourage greater engagement of a new attendee in the faith and life of the church.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The reliability of research instruments of the project was reviewed through a pilot study to check for content validity and functionality. Through this process several questions and statements were reworded for clarification and ease of understanding. The surveys and focus group questions were developed in alignment with the purpose of the project and research questions. The design of the instruments was based upon the goal of collecting the type of data that would identify the positive and negative guest

experiences. The use of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods in surveys and discussion questions for the pastor and guest participants added to the validity and reliability of the project. Through these instruments of surveys, focus groups and personal interviews, valuable and reliable data and insights were extracted.

The use of SurveyGizmo.com as the survey platform insured consistency and validity in data collection and analysis for both pastor and guest participants through detailed reports, charts and graphs pertaining to participant responses. The use of Nazarene Research Services to help in the creation of the surveys and the emailing of the introductory emails containing the link to the online survey provided reliability and validity of the study to the receivers.

The researcher took every precaution to record focus groups and personal interviews through digital audio recording and written notation for each session. The written notations served as clarification and cross-reference for the digital audio recordings. The focus groups and interviews further clarified perceptions and observations of participant guest experiences and disclosed contributing factors that influence positive and negative experiences.

Review of the Chapter

Chapter 3 detailed the methodology and context for the study as well as the procedure for collection and analysis of the data. Chapter 4 reports the findings gathered in this study. Data analysis is presented along with detailed charts and graphs. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the study, including evaluation and interpretation of the findings in light of the purpose of the study, and provides practical insights and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Almost every church has some type of formal or informal strategy and process to meet, greet and engage new attendees. Yet, the typical church only retains a small percentage of new attendees who find a place of connection and belonging in the church that leads them to continued attendance and engagement.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in mid-sized Nazarene churches located in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. The goal of the study was to provide insight and strategies for churches to create more positive guest experiences and reduce negative guest experiences so as to provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return, encounter the life-transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and engage in the life and mission of the church.

This chapter describes the participants and demographics, data collected through a web-based pastor survey (PS) and guest survey (GS), pastor personal interviews (PI), new attendee focus groups and interviews (GF), and an analysis of the data by the research question addressed.

Participants

Based on data provided by Nazarene Research Services, 504 Nazarene churches in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri were listed as active in 2016. Out of the 504 churches, thirty-five churches were selected as subjects for this study because they

matched the criteria of the study of being mid-sized Nazarene churches with an average worship attendance between 250 to 999. Two churches were between pastors, reducing the list of subject churches to thirty-three. Following the initial email invitation to participate in the study, one pastor asked for his name to be removed from participation. Out of the thirty-two pastors invited to participate in the study through personal phone calls, a personal email and an email invitation through Nazarene Research Services, fifteen pastors consented to participate in the web-based pastor survey. This represents a 43.75% participation rate and a 93.3% completion rate in the pastor survey.

As part of the invitation email sent to pastors, pastors were asked to copy and send out an email invitation to participate in the guest survey to every guest that had attended their churches within the past six months. The pastors who participated in the study estimated that between 1,000 to 2,000 guests had visited their churches within the past six months. Out of this number an unknown number of emails were sent by the pastors to guests inviting them to participate in this study. Of the unknown number of guest invitation emails that were sent from participating churches, nineteen guests consented to participate in the study and fifteen completed and submitted the web-based guest survey. This represents a 78.9% completion rate of the guest survey.

Disclaimer

Based on the limited number of guest survey participants it was a challenge to draw significant conclusions. The limited number of guest responses may be the result of a variety reasons of which the researcher can list a litany of conjectures, but each would be speculative and have no substance for this study. Suffice to say that the lack of guest survey participants means that the findings of the guest surveys do not adequately

provide a significant sampling to make definitive quantitative analysis as to the effect of positive and negative guest experiences. However, the responses of those who did participate in the guest survey do provide qualitative data and real life snapshots of their experiences in visiting a mid-sized Nazarene church. In this sense, the responses of these participants should not be discounted. These responses, though limited in breadth, do provide depth of insight into the kinds of experiences that are encouraging and discouraging for a first-time guest when visiting a church and present several significant findings.

Church Demographic Data

The demographic data received from participating churches included the average weekend worship attendance, estimated number of guests over the past six months, estimated number of guests each Sunday, and estimated number of guests over the past six month who continued to attend.

Worship Attendance. According to the pastors survey the participating churches range in attendance from 250 to 650. Individual churches averaged 250, 253, 260, 293, 325, 400, 534, 600, 647 and 650 each. Two churches averaged 330 each and two churches averaged 350 each. The mean attendance was 398. The median attendance was 330.

Guests each Sunday. The pastor survey data showed that the estimated number of guests each Sunday in these churches range from 2 to 25. Two churches estimated 2 guests weekly. Two churches estimated 3. Two churches estimated 4. Two churches estimated 5. Three churches estimated 6 guests weekly. One church estimated 7. One

church estimated 10 and one church estimated 25 guests attend their church each Sunday. The mean number of guests was 6.3 and the median number of guests was 5.

Guests over Six Months. Data from the pastor survey showed that the estimated number of guests who attended these churches over six months range from 20 to 1000. One church estimated 20. One church estimated. Two churches estimated 30. One church estimated 48. One church estimated 60. One church estimated 75. One church estimated 78. One church estimated 80. One church estimated 100. One church estimated 120. One church estimated 150. One church estimated 182 and one church estimated 1,000 guests. The mean number of guests over a six-month period was 142.7 and the median number of guests was 75.

Guests Returning. According to the pastor survey the estimated number of guests who attended these churches over six months and continue to attend ranged from 2 to 400. One church estimated 2. One church estimated 6. One church estimated 8. Two churches estimated 10. One church estimated 15. Three churches estimated 20. Two churches estimated 21. One church estimated 25. One church estimated 50. One church estimated 400. The mean number of guests over a six-month period who continue to attend is 44.8. The median number of guests is 20.

Pastor Survey Participant Demographic Data

The demographic data from these pastors included their own gender, current marital status, age category, children living at home, type of community information. The details were as follows: (1) Gender - Of the fourteen pastors who completed the survey, one was female and thirteen were male. (2) Current Marital Status - All of the pastor participants were married. The marital status ranged from thirteen in their first

marriage and one who was remarried after divorce or widow(ed). (3) Age - The dispersion of pastor ages showed that one was between the ages of 25-34. Two were between the ages of 35-44. Five were between the ages of 45-54. Three were between the ages of 55-64 and one was between the ages of 65-74. Two pastors did not report an age category. (4) Children Living at Home - Pastor participants reported having zero to four children still living at home. Six reported having no children living in the home. Of the pastors who reported having children age five or younger, two reported having children age 6 to 12; four reported having children 13 to 18; and two reported having children 19 or older living at home. (5) Community -The communities the pastors lived in was varied. Three described themselves as living in an urban setting; five in a suburban setting; three in a small town; and three in a rural setting.

Guest Survey Participant Demographic Data

The demographic data from guest participants included gender, current marital status, age category, children living at home, type of community. (1) Gender - Of the 15 guests who completed the survey, 9 were female and 4 were male. Two did not indicate gender. (2) Current Marital Status - The marital status ranged from being single to being remarried. One person identified themselves as single, never married. Nine people identified themselves as being in their first marriage. Four people identified themselves as being remarried after divorce or widow(ed). (3) Age - The dispersion of ages indicated that none were between the ages of 18-24. Three were between the ages of 25-34. Five were between the ages of 35-44. Two were between the ages of 45-54. One was between the ages of 55-64 and three were between the ages of 65-74. One person did not report an age category. (4) Children Living at Home - The guest participants reported having from

zero to six children still living at home. Five reported having no children living in the home. Of the participants who reported having children living at home, four reported having children age 5 or younger; seven reported having children age 6 to 12; one reported having children 13 to 18; and, one reported having children 19 or older living at home. (5) Community - The communities the guests lived in varied. Four described themselves as living in an urban setting; eight in a suburban setting; two in a small town; and one in a rural setting.

Pastor Interview Participant Demographic Data

Pastors that were interviewed were randomly selected from the list of pastors from subject churches. Some took the survey. Some did not. The demographic data for these pastors included gender, age range, length of current pastorate. (1) Gender - Of the six pastors who took part in a phone interview, all were male. (2) Age - The dispersion of ages represented three age categories. One pastor was between the ages of 35-44. Three were between the ages of 45-54 and two were between the ages of 55-64. (3) Length of Current Pastorate - The length of time that each pastor served in their current pastorates varied. Two had served as lead pastor for the past six years, following twelve years as an associate pastor in the church. One has served for five years. One had served nine years. One had served for ten years, following seventeen years as an associate pastor in the church. And, one had served for twenty years, following twenty-seven years as a layman in the church.

New Attendee Focus Group Participant Demographic Data

Guests and new attendees who participated in the new attendee focus group had all visited one of the subject churches over the sampling period.

The demographic data for these new attendees included gender, age range, length of time attending current church and current church involvement. (1) Gender - Of the 5 new attendees who took part in a focus group, 3 were female and 2 were male. (2) Age - The dispersion of ages represented that none were between the ages of 25-34. One was between the ages of 35-44. Two were between the ages of 45-54. None were between the ages of 55-64 and 2 were between the ages of 65-74. (3) Length of Time Attending Current Church - The length of time each guest attending their current church varied. Three had attended for 9 months. Two had attended for 5 months. (4) Church Involvement - The current church involvement of each new attendee varied. All 5 were regular in attending Sunday morning worship services as well as participating in an adult Sunday School class. Three of them had their children and teenagers involved in Sunday School and age group ministries. Two have helped out as a youth sponsor. One had sung in the church choir and one had taken on the project of creating an Advent Devotional using lay writers from the congregation.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What are the strategies and practices that churches actively utilize to retain new attendees?

Two pastor interview questions were used to answer this first research question. Each of the six pastors interviewed responded to the questions considering their specific contexts and settings, giving insight into the culture and operation of their respective churches.

Welcoming Guests

Pastor Interview question 1: What does your church do in order to welcome first-time guests?

Each pastor identified what their church does to welcome guests when they first attend their church. All the pastors recognized that the church must be intentional in welcoming new people by having structures and people in place to do so. Five of the six pastors identified having greeters in place to welcome newcomers was a key part of the hospitality strategy of their churches. One pastor stated that greeter organization for his church was a weak area, but quickly stated that, “Our whole church is a welcoming community. We have a culture of inclusiveness, where people are made to feel welcome without having to do much planning about it. Friendly is part of our culture.” Five of the churches acknowledge and welcome guests in their worship services. Three invite guests to fill out a guest card and leave it on their seat or turn it in at a welcome area following the service for a gift. One church was clear to say to their guests in service, “We don’t want to bug you, we just want to know you are here and who you are.” One out of the five, had guests raise their hands to receive a guest packet and gift. Three of these churches have a congregational greeting time where regular attendees greet newcomers and one another. One pastor stated that recognition is not comfortable for some, so they give clear permission to not participate if they so choose. All the pastors identified the importance of getting information from their guests through use of a guest card, pew folder or children’s check-in system. They also acknowledged that getting that information is not always easy and they do not receive any contact information on many guests who visit their churches. One church encouraged guests to indicate how they want

to be contacted on the communication card: a phone call, or email, or text, or a visit. All the churches have some sort of welcome packet with church information and a gift they give to first time attendees. Several of the gifts were beverage mugs. One church invites guests to take their gift mug to the church coffee bar for a free beverage of some kind with the goal that it will give church people opportunity to engage and talk with them. Four of the pastors indicated their priority of seeking to personally greet and engage with guests when at all possible.

Encouraging Guests to Return

Pastor interview question 5: What are the strategies and practices that your church actively uses to encourage guests to return?

Through the personal interviews, each pastor identified the strategies and practices their church uses to encourage guests to return. All of the pastors send a letter, handwritten note or personal email to guests on Monday or early in the week thanking them for visiting the church. Three pastors highlighted the personal touch of a handwritten note to guests. Three pastors stated that they mainly send personal emails to guests, unless only a physical address is available. One pastor noted that his church uses social media as much as possible to message a guest as well as see if the guest is friends with anyone in the congregation. If they are, they encouraged the friends to follow up with the guest as well. One church had a note writing ministry by lay persons who wrote hand written notes to guests. Two pastors identified the difficulty of making home visits to guests. Often guests are not home when visited, or they may not answer the door, or they may live in a gated community with access only to residents. On the other hand, one pastor stated that if a guest family has children, be it a child or teenager, the children's

pastor or youth pastor will stop by the home with a small gift to invite the child to return or to an upcoming event. Only one pastor referred to calling guests by phone and that was only if the guest indicated that this was their preferred way to be contacted. One pastor commented that telemarketers have ruined phone calls. Another pastor noted that an email or social messaging gives the guest the option to respond or ignore. Two pastors stated that personal emails had been the most effective means of connecting with a guest for their church.

In one pastor's guest email, the guest was invited to come to an introductory class taught by the pastor on the vision, beliefs, mission and ministry of the church. This class was used as the church's membership class.

Four pastors noted that any information on families with children or teenagers was forwarded to the children's or youth pastor, who then sent an email. Three pastors indicated that guest information was passed onto appropriate ministry leaders to invite the guest to a Sunday school class or small group or connection opportunity. One pastor described his church's follow up strategy like this. He said, "Once we get a person's or family's info, we follow three steps: We give a gift and welcome packet; the pastor makes a personal touch by a handwritten note or personal email; the name is passed onto a life group leader where they are invited to a life group (usually by email)."

For one church, their focus on following up on a guest is to do all they can to connect them to people the first time they visit the church. Their strategy doesn't focus on connecting the guest with the pastor, but on introducing and connecting them with several people in the church, because "we realize they have to find other kinds of connections if they are going to stick."

One pastor stated, “If a guest indicates a willingness to be connected to our fellowship, we immediately start asking them and one another around a leadership table of professional and lay leaders, how can we take this person or this family and find a friendship opportunity for them, whether that might be a Sunday school class or something else. We might throw several opportunities their way to see which one sticks.”

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What are the experiences that new church attendees have that encourage ongoing attendance and engagement?

The answer to this question was sought through the use of four pastor survey questions, four guest survey questions, one pastor interview question and two new attendee focus group questions. Four of the questions were quantitative and eight were qualitative. The hypothesis was that positive guest experiences would encourage ongoing attendance and engagement in a church. The surveys, interviews and focus group revealed several areas of insight.

Guests on Positive Experiences

Guest Survey Question 2: Please evaluate your experience as a first-time guest at the Church of the Nazarene within the past six months. To what extent was your experience or impression as a guest negative or positive in the each of the following areas?

Following the introductory question were 31 categories to which participants were asked to make a choice using a five-point Likert scale between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive and not applicable. On four of the categories only 14 participants gave responses. On nine categories 15 participants responded and on 18

categories 16 participants responded. This represented a participant who partially completed the survey. This was the only question on which this situation presents itself. (See Table 4.1.)

The top ten categories with the “positive” ratings included: Sermon (100%), friendliness of the pastor (100%), friendliness of people to each other (93.8%), overall experience (93.8), cleanliness of the facility (93.8%), sanctuary greeters/ushers (93.3%), accessibility to restrooms (93.3%), door greeters (92.9%), friendliness of people to you as a guest (86.7%), and general sense of welcome (86.7%).

Although the overall percentage scores were low in comparison other categories, it must be noted that for a distinct group of participants the categories pertaining to children (nursery, preschool and elementary) and youth were very significant when they evaluated their guest experience. This phenomenon could easily be overlooked, but for the high scores in the Not Applicable column for these categories. When looking at the demographics of guest participants it was immediately apparent that a number of participants did have children or teens in the home. This raised questions as to whether areas related to children and teens have any bearing or consideration in their guest experience.

Guest Survey Question 3: How influential or important are the following areas to you and your experience as a guest at the church?

Participants were asked to make a choice between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important and not applicable to measure their opinion on the same 31 categories used in GS2. On two categories 14 participants responded. On the remaining 29 categories, 15 participants responded. (See Table 4.2.)

Table 4.1. Guest Evaluation of Guest Experience

GUEST SURVEY QUESTION 2: Tell Us About Your Experience Please evaluate your experience as a first-time guest at the Church of the Nazarene within the past six months. To what extent was your experience or impression as a guest negative or positive in each of the following areas:

	Responses	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Somewhat Positive	Positive	Not Applicable
Church Signage	14	0%	7.1%	7.1%	85.7%	0%
Clearly Identified Entrance	14	0%	7.1%	7.1%	85.7%	0%
Guest Parking	15	6.7%	0%	13.3%	66.7%	13.3%
Parking Lot Greeters	14	0%	7.1%	7.1%	57.1%	28.6%
Door Greeters	14	0%	0%	7.1%	92.9%	0%
Welcome Desk / Area	15	0%	6.7%	0.0%	80.0%	13.3%
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	15	0%	0%	6.7%	93.3%	0%
Music	15	0%	0%	26.7%	73.3%	0%
Sermon	15	0%	0%	0.0%	100.0%	0%
General Sense of Welcome	15	0%	0%	13.3%	86.7%	0%
Access to Information	15	0%	0%	26.7%	73.3%	0%
Accessibility to Restrooms	15	0%	6.7%	0%	93.3%	0%
Friendliness of People to you as a Guest	15	0%	0%	13.3%	86.7%	0%
Friendliness of People to Each Other	16	0%	0%	6.3%	93.8%	0%
Friendliness of the Pastor	16	0%	0%	0%	100.0%	0%
Cleanliness of the Facility	16	0%	0%	6.3%	93.8%	0%
Inside Signage	16	0%	6.3%	12.5%	81.3%	0%
Children's Check-in	16	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	37.5%
Nursery	16	0%	0%	0%	31.3%	68.8%
Preschool Area	16	0%	0%	0%	25.0%	75.0%
Preschool Care / Classes	16	0%	0%	6.3%	25.0%	68.8%
Children's Area	16	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%
Children's Classes	16	0%	0%	0%	43.8%	56.3%
Youth Area	16	0%	0%	0%	25.0%	75.0%
Youth Classes	16	0%	0%	0%	25.0%	75.0%
Adult Classes	16	0%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%
Visitor Gift	16	6.3%	0%	6.3%	37.5%	50.0%
Welcome Letter / Email	16	0%	0%	12.5%	75.0%	12.5%
Personal contact by a Pastor	16	0%	0%	12.5%	81.3%	6.3%
Personal contact by a Church Member	16	0%	6.3%	18.8%	50.0%	25.0%
Overall Experience	16	0%	0%	6.3%	93.8%	0%

The top ten categories with the rating of “very important” include: Sermon (100.0%), general sense of welcome (86.7%), overall experience (80%), music (73.3%), friendliness of people to each other (66.7%), friendliness of the pastor (66.7%), friendliness of people to you as a guest (60%), personal contact by a pastor (60%), adult classes (53.3%), and access to information (46.7%).

As mentioned under the previous question (GS2), it must be noted that a distinct group of participants did not have children or youth in the home. Thus, the categories pertaining to children (nursery, preschool and elementary) and youth were likely marked “not applicable.” Yet, the high percentages in the “important” and “very important” columns in comparison to the “not applicable” column beckon these categories be considered. In other words, children and youth programs are important for those who have children and teens, but may not be of consideration for those who do not.

Guest Survey Question 4: What experience stood out as the most encouraging to you?

Of the thirteen written guest responses, eight responses referenced the friendliness and personal contact of the pastor. One guest wrote, “The pastor introduced himself and made it a point to welcome me and my family.” Six responses referenced the friendliness of the people and four responses referenced the significances of the sermon. One guest wrote, “We love the sermon. It really reached us.”

Guest Survey Question 12: If YES (*the guest is still attending the church*), what would you say is the most significant reason why?

Of the six written guest responses, two responses referenced the most significant reasons for still attending the church were connecting with people and getting involved.

Table 4.2. Guest Experience Areas of Influence

GUEST SURVEY QUESTION 3: How influential or important are the following areas to you and your experience as a guest at the church?						
	Responses	Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Not Applicable
Church Signage	15	6.7%	33.3%	40.0%	13.3%	6.7%
Clearly Identified Entrance	15	6.7%	20.0%	60.0%	13.3%	0%
Guest Parking	14	26.7%	26.7%	33.3%	6.7%	0%
Parking Lot Greeters	15	33.3%	33.3%	26.7%	6.7%	0%
Door Greeters	15	13.3%	26.7%	40.0%	20.0%	0%
Welcome Desk / Area	15	6.7%	33.3%	33.3%	26.7%	0%
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	15	0%	33.3%	53.3%	13.3%	0%
Music	15	0%	0%	26.7%	73.3%	0%
Sermon	15	0%	0%	0%	100.0%	0%
General Sense of Welcome	15	0%	0%	13.3%	86.7%	0%
Access to Information	15	0%	6.7%	46.7%	46.7%	0%
Accessibility to Restrooms	15	0%	26.7%	46.7%	26.7%	0%
Friendliness of People to you as a Guest	15	0%	0%	33.3%	60.0%	6.7%
Friendliness of People to Each Other	14	0%	0%	26.7%	66.7%	0%
Friendliness of the Pastor	15	0%	6.7%	26.7%	66.7%	0%
Cleanliness of the Facility	15	0%	6.7%	53.3%	40.0%	0%
Inside Signage	15	6.7%	26.7%	40.0%	20.0%	6.7%
Children's Check-in	15	0%	0%	40.0%	26.7%	33.3%
Nursery	15	0%	0%	26.7%	13.3%	60.0%
Preschool Area	15	0%	0%	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%
Preschool Care / Classes	15	0%	0%	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%
Children's Area	15	0%	0%	20.0%	26.7%	53.3%
Children's Classes	15	0%	0%	20.0%	33.3%	46.7%
Youth Area	15	0%	0%	20.0%	13.3%	66.7%
Youth Classes	15	0%	0%	20.0%	13.3%	66.7%
Adult Classes	15	6.7%	0%	40.0%	53.3%	0%
Visitor Gift	15	53.3%	20.0%	13.3%	6.7%	6.7%
Welcome Letter / Email	15	26.7%	6.7%	46.7%	20.0%	0%
Personal contact by a Pastor	15	6.7%	6.7%	26.7%	60.0%	0%
Personal contact by a Church Member	15	0%	26.7%	33.3%	40.0%	0%
Overall Experience	15	0%	0%	20.0%	80.0%	0%

Two responses referred to the helpfulness of the pastor's messages. One person said they enjoyed the praise and worship. In stating the most significant reason for still attending the church, one person plainly stated, "After visiting many other churches, realized the worst of Rogers First, was better than the best of the rest."

New Attendee Focus Group Question 2: What is an example of an encouraging experience you had when you first visited this church?

This question was addressed in the new attendee focus group by inviting each guest to tell some of their story of first coming to the church.

One person said, "It started when we walked through the front door. We were welcomed, and we were no longer strangers." Another couple said, "Having greeters open the door for us and reach out their hand and speak to us. Someone walked right up and said "Hi," introduced themselves and began a conversation with us. She was warm and friendly like we had known her for so long." Another couple said, "It was the same for us. There were three sets of greeters we had to get through. The most impactful thing for me was coming on a Wednesday night with my kids. It took 10 seconds for someone to connect with my daughter. That was an instant hit for me. We didn't think a church like this existed anymore."

Two people said that the medium size of the church mattered. They said they had been to some very large churches and there was a feeling of being ushered in and out because of the multiple worship services. What was encouraging to them was connecting with real people rather than just watching a great worship service in a crowd or on their computer or television. Three people commented that coming to this church made them

feel like they were more than a number. They felt like family. They also felt a sense of belonging and contribution and usefulness.

New Attendee Focus Group Questions 5. For those of you who are still attending this church, what kept you here? What experience(s) did you have that encouraged your ongoing engagement with the church?

All of the group members shared about their experiences of first coming to the church. They used words like relationships, feeling like a family and the feeling of being connected as being encouraging to them. One person said that it was wonderful getting texts and personal contacts from the church. Another person said, “I had surgery three months ago. I didn’t call the church and when I let the pastors know, I was kind of reprimanded for not telling. This made me feel cared for and interested in like we were family.”

Four group members commented about not being Nazarene and researching the church before they visited. They were encouraged by the openness to women in ministry; how kids are included and made full members; and the focus on world missions and the stability of the local and international church organization. These were positive factors that contributed to their staying in the church.

Each person in the group said it was encouraging that the church brings everyone together – all ages and involves everyone in ministry. One person said, “My son has found a place if belonging in the media ministry and my daughter is helping with watching kids. They love it.”

Pastors on Positive Experiences

Pastor Survey Question 6: Please evaluate the experience a first-time guest might have at your church. To what extent do you think their experience or impression as a guest is negative or positive in the each of the following areas.

Following the introductory question were 31 categories to which participants were asked to make a choice using a five-point Likert scale between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive and not applicable. On three of the categories only 13 participants gave responses. On the remaining 28 categories 14 participants responded. (See Table 4.3.)

The top fourteen categories with the rating of “Positive” include: Friendliness of the Pastor (85.7%), Door Greeters (78.6%), General Sense of Welcome (78.6%), Clearly Identified Entrance (71.4%), Music (71.4%), Friendliness of People to the Guest (71.4%), Nursery (71.4%), Sermon (64.3%), Accessibility to Restrooms (64.3%), Friendliness of People to Each Other (64.3%), Cleanliness of the Facility (64.3%), Children's Area (64.3%), Children's Classes (64.3%), and Welcome Letter/Email (64.3%).

Pastor Survey Question 7: How influential or important do you think the following areas are to the positive experience of a guest at your church?

Participants were asked to make a choice between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important and not applicable to measure their opinion on the same 31 categories used in PS6. All 14 participants responded on each category. (See Table 4.4.)

Table 4.3. Pastor Evaluation of the Guest Experience

PASTOR SURVEY QUESTIONS 6: Please evaluate the experience a first-time guest might have at your church. To what extent do you think their experience or impression as a guest is negative or positive in each of the following areas:

	Responses	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Somewhat Positive	Positive	Not Applicable
Church Signage	14	0%	14.3%	64.3%	21.4%	0%
Clearly Identified Entrance	14	0%	14.3%	7.1%	71.4%	7.1%
Guest Parking	14	7.1%	7.1%	35.7%	50.0%	0%
Parking Lot Greeters	14	0%	14.3%	28.6%	21.4%	35.7%
Door Greeters	14	0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	0%
Welcome Desk / Area	14	0%	14.3%	21.4%	50.0%	14.3%
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	14	0%	14.3%	28.6%	57.1%	0%
Music	14	0%	0%	28.6%	71.4%	0%
Sermon	14	0%	0%	35.7%	64.3%	0%
General Sense of Welcome	14	0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	0%
Access to Information	14	0%	14.3%	57.1%	28.6%	0%
Accessibility to Restrooms	14	0%	0%	35.7%	64.3%	0%
Friendliness of People to the Guest	14	0%	14.3%	14.3%	71.4%	0%
Friendliness of People to Each Other	14	0%	0%	35.7%	64.3%	0%
Friendliness of the Pastor	14	0%	0%	14.3%	85.7%	0%
Cleanliness of the Facility	14	0%	0%	35.7%	64.3%	0%
Inside Signage	14	0%	14.3%	50.0%	35.7%	0%
Children's Check-in	14	0%	14.3%	35.7%	50.0%	0%
Nursery	14	0%	7.1%	21.4%	71.4%	0%
Preschool Area	14	0%	7.1%	35.7%	42.9%	14.3%
Preschool Care / Classes	14	0%	7.1%	35.7%	42.9%	14.3%
Children's Area	14	0%	0%	35.7%	64.3%	0%
Children's Classes	14	0%	0%	35.7%	64.3%	0%
Youth Area	13	0%	0%	46.2%	53.8%	0%
Youth Classes	13	0%	7.7%	46.2%	38.5%	7.7%
Adult Classes	13	0%	7.7%	53.8%	30.8%	7.7%
Visitor Gift	14	0%	14.3%	21.4%	42.9%	21.4%
Welcome Letter / Email	14	7.1%	0%	21.4%	64.3%	7.1%
Personal contact by a Pastor	14	0%	7.1%	42.9%	50.0%	0%
Personal contact by a Church Member	14	0%	35.7%	35.7%	21.4%	7.1%
Overall Experience	14	0%	7.1%	42.9%	50.0%	0%

The top ten categories with the rating of “very important” include: General sense of welcome (92.9%), sermon (85.7%), friendliness of people to the guest (85.7%), friendliness of the pastor (85.7%), nursery (85.7%), children's area (85.7%), door greeters (78.6%), cleanliness of the facility (78.6%), children's classes (78.6%), and youth area (78.6%).

Pastor Survey Question 8: What experience do you think is the most encouraging to a guest?

Of the 14 written responses, 11 pastors cited that the most encouraging thing to a guest is friendliness and a welcoming spirit of the people. One pastor wrote, “Being greeted warmly and ‘touched’ by multiple people, but not smothered is important.” Another pastor wrote, “Being welcomed yet not singled out, not only by designated greeters but also by those around them.” Three pastors suggested the sermon or relevant teaching would be encouraging to a guest. Two pastors referenced personal connection with the pastor as significant. Four referenced the music and enjoyment of worship experience.

Pastor Survey Question 14: If a guest returns to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why?

Fourteen responses were written by pastors ranging from experiencing God, having a friendship connection, feeling welcome, wanting to grow in their Christian walk and a strong children’s ministry. Seven responses highlighted the significance of people being friendly and welcoming. Two responses cited the significance of relevant worship and preaching. Three pastors cited personal contact and follow-up. One pastor stated it was “a follow-up strategy that involved some personal contact. It doesn't have to be from

the pastor or staff. It doesn't even have to be a good strategy. Something is better than nothing.”

Table 4.4. Pastor View of Areas that Influence Guest Experience

PASTOR SURVEY QUESTION 7: How influential or important do you think the following areas are to the positive experience of a guest at your church?						
	Responses	Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Not Applicable
Church Signage	14	0%	28.6%	42.9%	28.6%	0%
Clearly Identified Entrance	14	0%	7.1%	21.4%	64.3%	7.1%
Guest Parking	14	0%	42.9%	7.1%	50.0%	0%
Parking Lot Greeters	14	7.1%	28.6%	21.4%	42.9%	0%
Door Greeters	14	0%	0%	21.4%	78.6%	0%
Welcome Desk / Area	14	0%	7.1%	21.4%	64.3%	7.1%
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	14	0%	7.1%	21.4%	71.4%	0%
Music	14	0%	7.1%	21.4%	71.4%	0%
Sermon	14	0%	0%	14.3%	85.7%	0%
General Sense of Welcome	14	0%	0%	7.1%	92.9%	0%
Access to Information	14	0%	7.1%	21.4%	71.4%	0%
Accessibility to Restrooms	14	0%	7.1%	35.7%	57.1%	0%
Friendliness of People to the Guest	14	0%	0%	14.3%	85.7%	0%
Friendliness of People to Each Other	14	0%	0%	28.6%	71.4%	0%
Friendliness of the Pastor	14	0%	7.1%	7.1%	85.7%	0%
Cleanliness of the Facility	14	0%	0%	21.4%	78.6%	0%
Inside Signage	14	0%	0%	42.9%	57.1%	0%
Children's Check-in	14	0%	0%	28.6%	71.4%	0%
Nursery	14	0%	0%	14.3%	85.7%	0%
Preschool Area	14	0%	7.1%	7.1%	71.4%	14.3%
Preschool Care / Classes	14	0%	7.1%	7.1%	71.4%	14.3%
Children's Area	14	0%	7.1%	7.1%	85.7%	0%
Children's Classes	14	0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	0%
Youth Area	14	0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	0%
Youth Classes	14	0%	14.3%	21.4%	57.1%	7.1%
Adult Classes	14	0%	7.1%	35.7%	50.0%	7.1%
Visitor Gift	14	14.3%	21.4%	35.7%	28.6%	0%
Welcome Letter / Email	14	0%	7.1%	42.9%	50.0%	0%
Personal contact by a Pastor	14	0%	21.4%	35.7%	42.9%	0%
Personal contact by a Church Member	14	0%	14.3%	21.4%	64.3%	0%
Overall Experience	14	0%	0%	28.6%	71.4%	0%

Pastor Interview Question 1: What do you think would be considered encouraging experiences that a guest would have when they visit your church?

Through the personal interviews, six pastors identified what they thought would be encouraging experiences a guest may encounter at their church. All six pastors recognized the value of warm, genuine encouragement of guests and making them feel welcome at church. One pastor explained, “They would immediately make contact with someone in the church, that someone would greet them and acknowledge that they are there and are welcome. And that they would feel comfortable – it wouldn’t be awkward that they are a guest. It would be a warm and welcoming experience for them.” One pastor noted the importance of learning a person’s shaking their hand and making them feel welcome. Another pastor stated, “They would be greeted warmly and welcomed by any number of people. They would be directed to a Sunday school class or the worship service and invited to participate.” One pastor noted several experiences in saying, “It is encouraging when they are greeted, when more than one person makes the concerted effort to greet and welcome. Parents are encouraged, not only if their children are well cared for but if they find the children’s department, or the nursery or the youth department enjoyable and compelling. Our experience is that a brand-new person, if they feel some sort of resonance with the worship moment (a liturgical moment or the preaching moment), that also seems to be encouraging to folks as well.”

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What are the experiences that new church attendees have that discourage ongoing attendance and engagement?

This question was addressed in three pastor survey questions, three guest survey questions, one pastor interview question and two new attendee focus group and interview questions. Two of the questions were quantitative and seven were qualitative. The hypothesis was that negative guest experiences discourage ongoing attendance and engagement in a church. Just as there are experiences that guests can have that encourage their ongoing attendance and engagement in a church, there are also negative experiences that, if not overcome, inhibit and discourage their ongoing attendance and engagement with a church. The surveys, interviews and focus group revealed several areas of insight.

Guests on Negative Experiences

Guest Survey Question 2: Tell us about your experience. Please evaluate your experience as a first-time guest at the Church of the Nazarene within the past six months. To what extent was your experience or impression as a guest negative or positive in each of the following areas.

Following the introductory question were 31 categories to which participants were asked to make a choice using a five-point Likert scale between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive and not applicable. On four of the categories only 14 participants gave responses. On nine categories 15 participants responded. And on 18 categories 16 participants responded. This represents a participant who partially completed the survey. This is the only question on which this situation presents itself.

Two guest participants identified areas in which they had a “negative” experience or impression: Guest parking (6.7%) and visitor gift (6.3%). Eight categories were identified areas in which guest had “Somewhat Negative” experiences or impressions: Adult classes (12.5%), church signage (7.1%), clearly identified entrance (7.1%), parking

lot greeters (7.1%), welcome desk/area (6.7%), accessibility to restrooms (6.7%), inside signage (6.3%), and personal contact by a church member (6.3%). *See Table 4.1*

Guest Survey Question 5: What experience, if any, stood out as the most discouraging to you?

Nine participants wrote responses to this question. One participant recorded that the church they visited was in a building program: Church is undergoing construction so while it is encouraging that they are growing, it tends to create some chaos while undergoing construction- poor signage, gym not ideal worship area, etc.” Another participant noted that the level of adult classes was discouraging to them. They were looking for a class with some spontaneity. One participant wrote of the need for more signage at the church. One participant experienced the discouragement of “not feeling like I connected with anyone.” For one, “the music was a little too contemporary.” One participant wrote that they had experienced “too much contact and visitations from church members after visiting” and, four guest participants noted that there was not any experience that stood out as discouraging.

Guest Survey Question 13: If NO (*the guest did not visit the church again*), what would you say is the most significant reason why?

Six participants gave written responses to this question. One participant identified that they did not return to the church because they joined another Nazarene church. One participant did not return to the church because they “moved out of the area but attended a new Nazarene church.” One parent candidly wrote that they did not return because “My son doesn't like to go to children's church. He has a hard time with new experiences.” Then one participant revealingly wrote the reason they did not return:

“With any church I feel like I am in the way, too filthy and messed up to connect with people. Too embarrassed to reach out to connect with people.” Two of the responses were misunderstood and indicated positive reasons of why they are still part of the church.

New Attendee Focus Group Question 3: What discouraging experience(s), if any, did you have that you had to overcome?

In this question, the focus group members identified what they encountered as discouraging experiences, they had worked through to continue attending the church.

All of the group said that visiting an established adult Sunday School class was intimidating. One person said, “It is hard to find a Sunday School class we fit in. It is hard going into a class that is already established. Even with name tags we don’t know the names of a lot of people.”

Two people said it was difficult connecting with families in their age groups who could share life journey’s. They have had to overcome a lack of personal relationships and connections with people their age.

Another person found it difficult to find a place of connection on Wednesday nights. He said, “For me, coming on Wednesday night, I knew where to connect my kids, but there was only one option for me. I don’t know all the options out there. I would like to see more communication of information about the church and its ministries.”

New Attendee Focus Group Question 4: Have you had discouraging experiences in other churches you have visited? If so, what happened?

This question invited new attendee focus group members to identify any discouraging experiences they may have had with visiting any church in the past.

Each of the group members had differing negative experiences, some more acute than others. One person lamented on having gone to one church for over a year and a half and the pastor never learned her or her kid's names. Each group member stated that being ignored and feeling like there was no connection was very discouraging.

One couple recounted an experience they had a few years back. They said, "The worst thing for us was when we sent our teen to a youth group service that met during adult worship service. When service was over, the youth pastor told us that our son had accepted Christ and they wanted to baptize him right then. We said that we wanted to take him home and talk with him first. We when talked to our son he said, 'Mom, the leader screamed at us to accept Christ. Everyone was called to the front. I went because everybody went.' Later that day the that day youth pastor called and asked us to bring our son back to the church so that they could baptize him that day. We felt pressured and our kids were scared off. We never went back."

Pastors on Negative Experiences

Pastor Survey Question 6: Please evaluate the experience a first-time guest might have at your church. To what extent do you think their experience or impression as a guest is negative or positive in the each of the following areas.

Following the introductory question were 31 categories to which participants were asked to make a choice using a five-point Likert scale between negative, somewhat negative, somewhat positive, positive and not applicable. On three of the categories only 13 participants gave responses. On the remaining 28 categories 14 participants responded.

Two categories were identified as areas in which a guest might have a “negative” experience when visiting one of the participating churches: Guest parking (7.1%) and welcome letter/email (7.1%).

The top eleven categories were identified in which a guest might have a “somewhat negative” experience or impression at one of the participating churches: Personal contact by a church member (35.7%), church signage (14.3%), clearly identified entrance (14.3%), parking lot greeters (14.3%), welcome desk/area (14.3%), sanctuary greeters/ushers (14.3%), access to information (14.3%), friendliness of people to the guest (14.3%), inside signage (14.3%), children’s check-in (14.3%), and visitor gift (14.3%). *See Table 4.3.*

Pastor Survey Question 9: What experience, if any, do you think could be the most discouraging to a guest?

Fourteen responses were written by pastors describing what they thought could be the most discouraging experiences a guest might encounter when visiting a church. Six pastors identified experiencing unfriendliness of the people or the pastor as the most discouraging experience a guest might encounter. One described this as “Going unnoticed, not welcomed, ignored, and the sense that they are entering into a somewhat closed group of acquaintances and friends.” Four pastors stated that the most discouraging experience would be for the guest to be ignored. Four pastors identified of not knowing where to go and a lack of signage giving direction (nursery, class, and the like). One pastor wrote that it is discouraging when people in the church expect “unchurched and unsaved people to act, dress, and react the same as church people.” Other discouraging experiences were listed: “not experience God, irrelevant teaching,

attention being drawn to them, lack of confidence in care shown to children, bad worship experience.”

Pastor Survey Question 15: If a guest does not return to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why not?

Fourteen written responses addressed this question. Six pastors identified lack of connection with others as the most significant reason a guest does not return to the church. This could be that the guest “did not feel cared for” or it “just wasn’t a good fit for them.” One pastor wrote: “They did not feel comfortable or welcomed. If they make a connection with one person, then they will return in spite of mediocre music or preaching.” Five pastors stated that the most significant reason has to do with worship style. One pastor wrote it could be that some guests are looking “for a more traditional worship or the opposite - looking for a more cutting-edge music.” Another wrote they do not return because they are “looking for a different type of worship experience.” Other responses include: “Not enough programming for their family”; “Not experience God. Irrelevant/boring message”; and “the gospel is ‘foolishness’ and a ‘stumbling block’.”

Pastor Interview Question 2: What could be a discouraging experience that a newcomer might have that could discourage them from returning or further engaging with your church?

Through personal interviews, six pastors identified what they thought could be discouraging experiences a guest may encounter at their church.

Three pastors stated that what would be discouraging to a guest is to feel unwelcome or ignored. One pastor said, “The worse thing for someone would be to make the effort to come to church and slip in and out and never be touched in any way. To have

no effort made to welcome them.” One pastor said, “There are some people who want to come to church and walk in and out and not be bothered. But by in large, it is folks who feel they are ignored. That is a discouraging moment.” Two pastors referenced that their style of worship could be a discouraging factor for some. One pastor stated, “It could be for some, older people more than others younger is what they may be looking for in style of worship. If they are looking for a simple traditional service, we don’t do that anymore. We do a blended service with full instruments.” Another pastor said, “if they hear something in the service or message that is contrary to a tightly held core value or belief, I don’t think many of those folks stay with us either.” One pastor pointed said, “The most prevalent one that has happened through the years is when somebody says, ‘You’ve got my seat.’ I try to reiterate ever so often that, you don’t have a seat. These are God’s seats. That is just human nature.” Another pastor said a guest might be discouraged if they don’t understand the things “we do in the church.” And one pastor, in thinking of the families that visit his church said, “If their kids hate it, or a kid or parent feels a kid is unsafe, that is a deal breaker.”

Research Question #4: Description of Evidence

What are the most effective strategies and practices that the mid-sized church can utilize to retain new attendees?

Eight pastor survey questions, ten guest survey questions, two pastor interview questions and two new attendee focus group and interview questions were used in seeking to answer this research question. Ten of the questions were quantitative, ten were qualitative, and two were a mixture of quantitative and qualitative. The hypothesis was that there are certain practices and strategies for retaining new attendees that are more

effective than others. An analysis of the surveys, interviews and focus group revealed several areas of insight into these effective strategies and practices.

Influential Areas

Guest Survey Question 3: How influential or important are the following areas to you and your experience as a guest at the church?

Participants were asked to make a choice between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important and not applicable to measure their opinion on the same 31 categories used in GS2. The responses to this question gave insight into what may be some of the key influential areas of a church's practice that encourages new attendee retention. Using a five-point Likert scale between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important and not applicable, 100% of participants rated the "sermon" as "very important." Over 80% of guest participants rated the categories of "general sense of welcome" (86.7%) and "overall experience" (80%) as "very important." A majority of 73.3% rated "music" as "very important." A total of 66.7% of guest participants rated "friendliness of people to each other" and "friendliness of the pastor" as "very important." Precisely 60% of guests rated "friendliness of people to you as a guest" and "personal contact by a pastor" as "very important." Over half of the participants rated "adult classes" (53.3%) as "very important." And nearly half of participants rated "access to information" (46.7%) as "very important."

For those with children or youth, the areas that their children were part of were "important" or "very important" to them. The logic of the research assumes that the high number of participants who marked "not applicable" for categories related to children and

youth do not have children or teenagers living at home at the time of the survey. (See Table 4.2.)

Pastor Survey Question 7: How influential or important do you think the following areas are to the positive experience of a guest at your church?

In contrast to guest participants who identified how important 31 categories were to their experience as a guest, pastor participants were asked to express their opinion on to how important each of the categories are to a positive guest experience. Based on the same 31 categories used in GS2, GS3 and PS6, the 14 pastor participants choose between unimportant, somewhat important, important, very important and not applicable for each category.

The top ten categories with the rating of “very Important” include: General sense of welcome (92.9%), sermon (85.7%), friendliness of people to the guest (85.7%), friendliness of the pastor (85.7%), nursery (85.7%), children's area (85.7%), door greeters (78.6%), cleanliness of the facility (78.6%), children's classes (78.6%), and youth area (78.6%). Only three of the categories rated “very important” by guest participants show up in the top ten list of pastors: Sermon, friendliness of people to you as a guest, and friendliness of the pastor. On the other hand, nursery, children’s area, children’s classes. and youth area rated high for pastors and for guest with children in those ministry areas. (See Table 4.4.)

Suggested Improvement

Guest Survey Question 6: How could the church improve the guest experience?

Nine participants gave written responses to this question. Five participants wrote that they were pleased with their guest experience and did not have any suggestions to offer. One guest suggested “gifts” and “follow up.” Another stated, “I realize that the hour at church is busy but encourage people to get out of their comfort zones and find someone to connect with.” Related to follow up and creating connections, one participant told of an experience that connected with them and revealed a need. They stated, “The children's minister came by our house after we visited as guests which was pretty awesome. Would have been nice for other members of the pastor team to reach out to the adults in a similar manner.” And, one guest suggested that the church make “more information available about all the Sunday school classes available.”

Pastor Survey Question 10: How could your church improve the guest experience?

In comparison to GS6, fourteen participants gave written responses to this question. Four pastor participants pointed out their need to be more intentional in their hospitality ministries where church members would take more interest in guests. Three participants wrote that their follow up with guests needed improvement. Three pastors stated the need for “better signage” and “clarity of information as to how to get connected.” One pastors wrote that in his church improvement was needed “really in every area.” Other responses ranged from the need of “trained greeters,” “updated children's area,” and “after service greeters.” Three pastors referenced the need for parking lot greeters. One mentioned an improvement would be to add designated guest parking.

Attendance Influencers

Guest Survey Question 7: What most influenced you to come to this church in the first place?

Guest participants were asked to select one of twelve categories to indicate what most influenced their decision to come to church. Fifteen participants responded. Four (26.7%) of the guests were “invited by a Friend.” Three (20%) of the guests came by “word of mouth.” Two (13.3%) of the guests were influenced by “the church website.” One (6.7%) guest was “invited by a relative.” One (6.7%) guest “attended a small group.” In the “other” category, four (26.7%) of the guests gave other written responses. Two indicated being influenced to come because their children attend the church daycare/preschool. One “asked a member of the church where she went to church.” And, one was specifically looking for Nazarene church.

Table 4.5. Guest Influences that Lead to a Church Visit

GUEST SURVEY QUESTION 7: What most influenced you to come to this church in the first place? (Please select one)		
Responses: 15	#	%
Invited by a Friend	4	26.7%
Invited by a Relative	1	6.7%
Word of Mouth	3	20.0%
The Church Website	2	13.3%
I Attended a Small Group	1	6.7%
Other (please describe):		
Children go to the daycare affiliated with the church	1	6.7%
Going to chapel with daughter to preschool at church	1	6.7%
I actually asked a member of this church where she went to church	1	6.7%
Looking for Nazarene church	1	6.7%

New Attendee Focus Group Question 1: What brought you to this church the first time you visited?

This question invited new attendee focus group members to identify any discouraging experiences they may have had with visiting any church in the past. Two group members said, “We came on the recommendation of a friend. We were church shopping. A friend told us to come and check it out, and we did.” Another person said that one of the church members invited their children to come to church. The kids really liked it, so they came as well and are still here.

Another couple came to the church through their kid’s connection to a private school housed in the church. They were looking for a church and attended a school chapel service. The youth pastor spoke that day. The mother noticed a connection with her kids. They researched the Church of the Nazarene and felt like it could be a fit for them. They came and felt like the church was where the Lord wanted them.

Pastor Survey Question 11: What percentage of guests come to your church based on the following influences?

This question seeks to identify the pastor’s perspective on the categories that most influence a guest’s to visit their church. Pastor participants gave a percentage rating to each category as to how many guests come to their church based on the influence of that category. Pastor participants estimated the following percentage of their guests come to their churches due to the following influences: 65.7% of guests were “invited by a friend”; 55% of guests were influenced to come to church through “word of mouth”; 54.3% of guests were “invited by a relative”; 43.6% of guests were influenced to come through “attending a special event”; 40% of guests were influenced to come to church

through “the pastor”; 35.7% of guests were influenced to come to church through “the church website”; 30.7% of guests were influenced to come to church through “the church building”; 30.7% of guests were influenced to come to church because they are “living near the church”; 27.1% of guests were influenced to come to church through “church signage”; 26.4% of guests were influenced to come through “attending a small group”; 16.4% of guests were influenced to come to church through “church advertisement”; and 5% of guests were influenced to come church through “social media.” (See Table 4.6.)

Table 4.6. Pastor View of Guest Influences for Visiting the Church

PASTOR SURVEY QUESTION 11: What percentage of guests come to your church based on the following influences? (Rate each item)													
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	N/A	% Value
Invited by a Friend	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	5	5	0	0	0	65.7
Invited by a Relative	0	1	0	2	1	4	0	4	1	1	0	0	54.3
Word of Mouth	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	6	0	0	0	55.0
The Church Website	0	3	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	35.7
Church Signage	1	2	5	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	27.1
Church Advertisement	6	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	16.4
The Church Building	2	2	3	2	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	30.7
The Pastor	0	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	40.0
Living near the Church	0	4	4	2	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	30.7
Attend a Special Event	1	0	2	4	0	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	43.6
Attend a Small Group	2	1	2	1	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	26.4
Social Media	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5.0

Past Church Experiences

Guest Survey Question 8: Before coming to this church, what was your Church Experience? Participants were asked to mark all that apply.

Guest participants were asked to describe their past church experience by selecting all of the 10 categories provided. Seven (46.7%) guest participants were “looking for a new church.” Six (40%) guests indicated that they were a “lifelong participant in church.” Three (20%) guest participants indicated that had “been hurt in a church.” Two (13.3%) participants indicated that they had “started attending after having children.” One (6.7%) guest indicated that they “attend only on holidays.” One (6.7%) participant indicated that they “haven’t been attending for some time.” In the “other” category, three (20%) participants wrote responses to the question. One stated, “My wife and I were looking for a church together.” Another wrote, “Tried to live without a Church. That did not go well.” One wrote a personal confession, “I have felt like I wasn’t good enough, too messy and filthy, to come to a God who was pure and loving and caring.” (See Table 4.7.)

Table 4.7. Guest Church Experience

GUEST SURVEY QUESTION 8: Before coming to this church, what was your church experiences? (Please mark all that apply)		
Responses	#	%
Lifelong Participant in Church	6	40.0%
Attend only on Holidays	1	6.7%
Haven't been Attending for Some Time	1	6.7%
Started Attending after having Children	2	13.3%
Been Hurt in a Church	3	20.0%
Looking for a New Church	7	46.7%
Other (please describe):		
I have felt like I wasn't good enough, too messy and filthy, to come to a God who was pure and loving and caring.	1	6.7%
My wife and I were looking for a church together	1	6.7%
Tried to live without a Church. That did not go well.	1	6.7%

Pastor Survey Question 12: What percentage of guests come to your church with the following church experiences?

Pastors were asked to rate each of the ten categories of church experience based on the percentage of the guests who came to their church with these experiences. Compiling each pastor's rating for each category and averaging them based on the number of survey participants identified an overall rating system for the participants as a whole. Pastor participants estimated the following percentage of their guests come to their churches with the following church experiences: 58.6% of guests had "never been to church before"; 49.3% of guest were "looking for a new church"; 46.4% of guests "started attending after having children"; 45.7% of guests "started attending after a crisis"; 43.6% of guests "haven't been going for some time"; 43.6% of guests have "been hurt in a church"; 42.1% of guests "attend only on holidays"; 38.6% of guests "started attending after married"; 34.3% of guests are a "lifelong participant in church"; and 2.1% of guests are "curious about faith." (See Table 4.8.)

After the First Visit

Guest Survey Question 9: After your first visit, did you visit the church again?

In answer to this question, 100% of the 14 guest participants indicated that they did visit the church again.

Guest Survey Question 10: After your first visit, did you visit another church?

Table 4.8. Pastor View of Guest Church Experience

PASTOR SURVEY QUESTION 12: What percentage of guests come to your church with the following church experiences? (Rate each item.)													
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	N/A	% Value
Lifelong Participant	0	2	0	4	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	34.3
Attend only on Holidays	0	0	5	1	1	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	42.1
Haven't been Going	0	2	1	1	1	5	3	1	0	0	0	0	43.6
Never been to Church	1	2	2	3	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	58.6
Started after Married	1	0	0	4	2	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	38.6
Started after Children	1	0	2	2	1	5	0	2	1	0	0	0	46.4
Started after a Crisis	0	1	3	0	3	1	3	2	1	0	0	0	45.7
Been Hurt in a Church	0	0	2	3	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	43.6
Looking for a New Church	0	0	2	1	1	5	0	2	3	0	0	0	49.3
Curious About Faith	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.1

Fifteen guest participants responded to this question. 46.2% responded “yes” that they did visit another church after visiting the Church of the Nazarene. 53.8% responded “no” that they did not visit another church after visiting the Nazarene church.

Pastor Survey Question 13: After guests visit the church and do not return, what percentage do you think visit another church? Participants were asked to answer this question by indicating their response on a scale of 0 to 100%. Fourteen participants responded. Two pastors (14.3%) estimated that 70% of guests visit another church. Five pastors (35.7%) estimate that 60% visit another church. Three pastors (21.4%) estimate that 50% of guests visit another church. Two pastors (14.3%) estimate that 40% of guests visit another church. One pastor (7.1%) estimated that 30% of guests visit another church. And, one pastor (7.1%) estimate that only 10% of guests visit another church if they do not return to their church.

Guest Survey Questions 11: If you did visit the church again, are you still attending?

Of the fourteen participants who responded to this question, 66.7% of them indicated “yes” that they are still attending the church. 33.3% indicated that “no”, they are not still attending the church.

Guest Survey Question 12: If YES (*the guest is still attending the church*), what would you say is the most significant reason why?

Six guest participants noted responses to this question. Two responses referenced the most significant reason for still attending the church were connecting with people and getting involved. Two responses referred to the helpfulness of the pastor’s messages. One person said they enjoyed the praise and worship. In stating the most significant reason for still attending the church, one person plainly stated, “After visiting many other churches, realized the worst of Rogers First, was better than the best of the rest.”

Pastor Survey Question 14: If a guest returns to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why?

Fourteen responses were written by pastors noting what they considered the most significant reasons why a guest would return to their church. Seven responses highlighted the significance of people being friendly and welcoming. Two responses cited the significance of relevant worship, liturgy and preaching. Three pastors cited personal contact and follow-up. One pastor stated it was “a follow-up strategy that involved some personal contact. It doesn't have to be from the pastor or staff. It doesn't even have to be a good strategy. Something is better than nothing.” Other responses included:

experiencing God, having a friendship connection, feeling welcome, wanting to grow in their Christian walk and a strong Children's ministry.

Guest Survey Question 14: Would you recommend this church to your family and friends?

In answer to this question, 100% of the 14 guest participants indicated that they would recommend the church that they visited to their family and friends.

Pastor Survey Question 16: Has your church had guests in the past six months who were recommended by previous guests?

In answer to this question, twelve (85.7%) of the fourteen participating pastors indicated that they have had guests who were recommended to their church by past guests. Two pastors (14.3%) indicated that they had not had any guests within the past six months who were recommended by those who had previously visited their church.

Encouragement to Engage

New Attendee Focus Group Questions 5. For those of you who are still attending this church, what kept you here? What experience(s) did you have that encouraged your ongoing engagement with the church?

All of the group members shared of their experiences of first coming to the church. They used words like relationships, feeling like a family, and the feeling of being connected as being encouraging to them. One person said that it was wonderful getting texts and personal contacts from the church. Another person said that the pastor and people showed care and interest in her family giving them a sense that they belonged.

Four group members commented about not being Nazarene and researching the church before they visited. They were encouraged by the openness to women in ministry;

how kids are included and made full members; and the focus on world missions and the stability of the local and international church organization. These were positive factors that contributed to their staying in the church.

Each person in the group said it was encouraging that the church brings everyone together – all ages and involves everyone in ministry. One person said, “My son has found a place if belonging in the media ministry and my daughter is helping with watching kids. They love it.”

Pastor Interview Questions 3: For those who are new to your church over the previous six months, what do you think, kept them there? What were the positive experiences they had that encouraged ongoing engagement with your church?

This question addressed the positive experiences a guest may have had when visiting one of the participating churches that influenced and encouraged their continued attendance and engagement with the church. Based on the knowledge of actual situations six pastors shared about the positive experiences that they knew were instrumental in encouraging guests to engage with the church.

Four pastors stated that the key to ongoing engagement is people in the church developing intentional relationships with new attendees in and outside of the worship experience. One pastor said, “It was the relationships they made or formed. It was the sense of community or welcome they experienced.” Another pastor said, “If we can get somebody hooked into a friendship group, it seems to be a crucial key in keeping a family. A friendship group covers small groups, community groups, Sunday school classes and ministry groups. Some people get connected by jumping into mission. We

want people to experience friendship with God (a worship moment) and friendship with one another (a friendship group). Intentional relationships are key.”

One pastor stated that many of the people who have been guests and stayed in the church are people he personally invested in. He cited, “The lead pastor can’t invest personally in every person, but these were people who stayed.” He also stated the importance of getting to know what is going on in the life of the new attendee. He said, “The biggest homerun is with families who have gone through crisis and we loved them through it.” Two pastors stated, “For new families, it has been our children and youth ministries.” According to their comments, if a guest’s children enjoy the children’s ministry and connect, it is more likely they will connect as well. One pastor stated that what was most influential for many guests is “feeling the Spirit of God in our place.” Another said, “it is the plain preaching of the Gospel.”

Two pastors stated that getting to know and remembering a newcomer’s name is vital. One pastor told of one such incident. He said, “I had a couple tell me not long ago that the second time they came, that when I saw them, I called them by name, and they said that stood out to them that I knew who they were.” Another pastor said, “I asked a guy the other day on how he got to Friendly Chapel. He said, ‘I came in a soup kitchen and you introduced yourself and I came back the next day and you called me by my name. And I’ve been here ever since.’ People feeling a human connection with them and remembering who they were, especially in this day and age of emails and marketing calls goes a long way.”

Effective Practices

Pastor Interview Questions 6: What have been the most effective strategies and practices that your church has utilized that have resulted in guests returning?

This question addressed what six pastors considered the most effective strategies and practices utilized at their church that have resulted in guests returning.

Two pastors said that their most effective strategy and practice was their church's atmosphere of warmth and acceptance. Guests are influenced by the genuineness of the people and their intentional invitation for them to be a part of their fellowship. One pastor said, "Our most effective strategies are those friendship strategies (connecting guests to a Sunday School class, small group, community group or ministry group). If we can enmesh a person or family into our culture where friendship can be found, that is the way to keep folks coming back." One pastor stated, "The most effective has been when the children's or youth pastor showed up at a home with kids with a gift. Making effort to go to their home for a quick drop in visit. We've seen a lot of fruit there." One pastor emphasized, "there is something about the personal touch from the senior pastor. We have seen growth from people who want personal touch." Another pastor said, "The most effective thing for us is the personal email. We get a 90% response from people from a personal email or through social media. It is difficult to get contact information, but we are getting better at it." One pastor said that their most effective strategy was to maximize the influence of the guest's first visit to their church. He said, "We invite them at that moment to come and receive a thank you gift. We discovered that when we were trying to take things to people we would often not find them at home; or, they would not

come to the door; or, you couldn't get into their neighborhood because of their code. So, we tried to make a better connection in the moment they are here."

Guest Survey Questions 20: Please use this space to share any additional comments not covered by the survey.

One response was given as an additional comment: "We feel like we finally found a church where we can learn, grow and be of service, through Christ."

Pastor Survey Question 22: Please used this space to share any additional comments not covered by this survey.

Three responses were given as additional comments by pastor participants. Once pastor expressed that he thought that "the foundation of prayer" should have been addressed as a crucial factor. Another pastor commented on the limited focus of the survey to worship services when his Wednesday night outreach "almost equals our Sunday AM."

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings emerged based on the data collected through surveys, focus group discussions, and individual interviews regarding the positive and negative experiences of guests when visiting mid-sized Nazarene church. The following is a list of the major findings of this study in summary form. (1) A welcoming and friendly culture and intentional engagement of regular attendees with guests and newcomers influence positive guest retention. (2) Personal contact by a pastor is a significant factor in guest connection and retention. (3) The role and connection of the sermon is a central factor in the engagement of newcomers. (4) Personal invitation and word-of-mouth positive talk about a church are the major influences that lead people to visit a church. (5) Adult

classes and small groups are significant in creating an atmosphere and connections that engage newcomers into the body and life of the church. (6) Children's and youth ministry must be a continuing church wide and multigenerational emphasis in a local church to reach, minister to and engage families. They will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Review of the Chapter

This chapter presented the data collected through surveys, focus groups and interviews. The data was analyzed as to its response to the research questions. The chapter concluded by summarizing the major findings discovered in the analysis. Chapter 5 concludes the study by offering a summary, evaluation and interpretation of the findings in light of the purpose of the study, observations and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Every church, sooner or later, has guests walk through the doors. Some churches, perhaps due to size, or location, or reputation, or marketing have more guests visit than others. Some come with friends or family. Some come looking for a new church home or friends. Some come just looking for God. Whether it is a large number of guests or a few, the typical church retains only a small percentage of new attendees who find a place of connection and belonging in the church that leads them to continued attendance and engagement.

Over the years, a significant number of practices and strategies have been created to assist churches in greeting and welcoming new people. Yet often the point of view of the guest as to what is positive and engaging or just good marketing to them? Therefore, it was important to do a research study on the experiences of guests when they first visit a church so that churches can better create positive and engaging experiences for the guests they have.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in Nazarene churches with an average worship attendance of 250 to 999. The research focused on mid-sized Nazarene churches located in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. The goal of the study was to provide insight and strategies for churches to create more positive guest experiences and reduce negative guests' experiences so as to provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return, encounter the life-

transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and engage in the life and mission of the church.

The intent of this chapter is to present the findings, implications, limitations, unexpected observances and recommendations for future study based on the results of the research of this study.

Major Findings

Several major findings emerged based on the data analysis conducted of surveys, focus group discussions, and individual interviews regarding the positive and negative experiences of guests when visiting a mid-sized Nazarene church. The findings represent what pastors and guests identified as the key experiences and church strategies that encourage or discourage continued engagement of newcomers in a faith community. The following is a discussion of the major findings of this study.

A Welcoming Culture

Throughout the project research, the issue of a church having a welcoming and friendly culture repeatedly came to the surface in survey responses as well as in the personal interviews and focus groups. Church members in a welcoming culture are intentionally friendly and welcoming of all newcomers into their friendship circles and church life. These churches have a sense of hospitality, openness and warmth. One pastor described this culture as when a guest would be immediately greeted by someone in the church who made it a priority to acknowledge the guest and make the guest feel comfortable and included. A welcoming culture is more than a program in the church. It is more than family structure or standing. It is an intentional engagement where regular attenders connect with others, remember their names and invite them into their circles.

The essence of a welcoming culture is captured by Robert Schnase when he describes Christian hospitality as, “a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community, an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known, a love that motivates Church members to openness and adaptability, a willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of new comers” (Schnase, *Five Practices* 70-73).

This kind of hospitality “always has an outward movement to it” (Marty). Genesis 18:2 tells the story of Abraham and Sarah and their encounter with three divine guests. This is one of the greatest passages in Scripture on hospitality: Abraham actually runs towards his guests to welcome them. In a welcoming culture we must continue to make moving outward from ourselves toward other people a priority, because our natural desire for comfort often twists our outward focus around to become an inward-directed reality (Marty).

In the written responses on the guest survey, six participants referenced “the friendliness of people” as a key experience that encouraged them when they visited the church. One new attendee focus group member said, “It started when we walked through the front door. We were welcomed, and we were no longer strangers.” Of the pastors surveyed 92.9% identified “general sense of welcome” as very important in influencing a positive experience of a guest. Of the guests surveyed 86.7% identified this as very important in influencing a positive guest experience. All of the pastors recognized the importance of a guest being warmly and genuinely greeted and made to feel welcome at church.

A sense of welcome for a newcomer begins the moment they pull into the parking lot. Parking lot greeters helping guests find a parking place, greeting them and directing them to the church entrance. Greeters extending a friendly, genuine handshake and warm greeting. Regular attendees being warm and inviting (Farr and Kotan, *Get their Name* 93). This kind of hospitality doesn't happen by accident and will not occur in any significant way in a church unless it is given deliberate attention (Pohl, *Hospitality* 37).

The opposite of a welcoming culture was described by one pastor as when “someone would make the effort to come to church and slip in and out and never be touched in any way – to have no effort made to welcome them.” Another pastor described this as, “Going unnoticed, not welcomed, ignored and having the sense they are entering into a closed group of acquaintances and friends.”

In a welcoming culture, each member of the church sees themselves as a host and takes responsibility for its guests (McIntosh, *Beyond* 20). This is how one of the pastor's interviewed described his church, “Our whole church is a welcoming community. We have a culture of inclusiveness where people are made to feel welcome without having to do much planning about it. Friendly is part of our culture.” Two pastors said that their most effective strategy and practice was their church's atmosphere of warmth and acceptance. One new attendee focus group member in describing the welcome they received at the church they visited said, “We didn't think a church like this existed anymore”

In each case of a guest who returned and engaged in a church, the welcoming culture of the church had significant influence on positive guest retention. Even with this kind of response, “the goal of hospitality is not to get people to return. That is the by-

product. The goal is to mirror the loving welcome of Jesus Christ and live it out in tangible ways” (Ozier & Haworth 10). More than anywhere else, when we gather as church our practice of hospitality should reflect God’s gracious welcome (Pohl, *Hospitality*). The depth of this is illustrated in 1 John 4:11 where the Apostle John writes, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Although it involves responsibility and faithful performance of duties, hospitality emerges from a grateful heart; it is first a response of love and gratitude for God’s love and welcome to us (Pohl, *Hospitality*). This is to say that we can love others because we ourselves are loved by God. (See 1 John 4:19.)

A sense and culture of welcome is directly connected with the next finding: The friendliness of the pastor.

Pastoral Contact

Personal contact by the senior pastor is a significant factor in guest connection and retention. Many pastors underestimate their impact on the guest experience. When a guest visits a church, he or she is not only expecting the people of the congregation to be welcoming, they also have definite expectations that the senior pastor and other pastors will also be personable and welcoming

When asked about the importance of the friendliness of the pastor, 100% of the guests surveyed indicated that friendliness of the pastor was very important and 93.3% of guests indicated that the friendliness of the pastor was influential to the guest experience. In written responses on the guest survey, eight participants referenced the friendliness and personal contact of the pastor as being the most encouraging experience that stood out to them from their visit to the church. One guest wrote, “The pastor introduced

himself and made it a point to welcome me and my family.” Of the pastors surveyed, 85.7% identified the friendliness of the pastor as very important and very influential to the guest experience. In written responses, two pastors referenced personal connection with the pastor as significant. Six pastors identified experiencing unfriendliness in a pastor as being a negative experience for guests.

In a new attendee focus group, one participant stated, “I had surgery 3 months ago. I didn’t call the church and when I let the pastors know, I was kind of reprimanded for not telling. This made me feel cared for and interested in like we were family.”

The personal friendliness of the pastor influences retention of guests. In the pastor interviews, one pastor told a recent story of a new attendee in his church. He said, “I asked a guy the other day on how he got to Friendly Chapel. He said, ‘I came to the soup kitchen and you introduced yourself and I came back the next day and you called me by my name. I’ve been here ever since.’ People feeling a human connection with them and remembering who they were, especially in this day and age of emails and marketing calls goes a long way.” In speaking of the significance of the friendliness of pastoral staff, one pastor stated, “The most effective practice in our church has been when the children’s or youth pastor showed up at a home with kids with a gift.” The pastor stated that this effort by his pastoral staff had been very fruitful in connecting newcomers to the church. Another pastor emphasized, “There is something about the personal touch from the senior pastor. We have seen growth from people who want a personal touch.”

In the earliest stages of a new attendee’s relationship with the church there is a significant connection between the newcomer and the pastor. No matter how a pastor might prefer not to be in this role, it is a significant factor in engagement and assimilation

into the church (Oswald and Leas 26-27). Pastoral leadership is critical in the engagement and assimilation process and is a key component in making guests feel welcome, connecting them with others, incorporating them in to the body of the church, helping the grow in spiritual disciplines and spiritual gifts, and develop relationally within small groups and new member classes (Attebery 62-63).

The Sermon

Today much emphasis is placed on the role of what is labeled as the “praise and worship” part of a service, and there needs to be. Music is important in creating an atmosphere of worship and participation of those in attendance. Though this component of worship is important, the proclamation of God’s Word is still a central element in the worship service for members and guests. The research identified that a central factor in the engagement of guests and newcomers is the sermon. Of all the other factors that guests indicated as being important and influential, the sermon was rated the highest at 100% in importance and influence to the guest experience.

In written responses on the guest survey, four participants noted the significance of the sermon. One participant wrote, “We loved the sermon. It really reached us.” Another guest wrote, “We love the Bible passages and the messages we receive and reminders we can use throughout the week to stay in Christ and not in our or the world’s will.” Two other participants indicated that the most significant reason they continued coming to the church was hearing Christ’s message and being encouraged by the pastor’s message. As part of the guest survey, participants were asked if they were still attending the church and what they would say is the most significant reason why they were still

attending. Of the six written guest responses, two referred to the helpfulness of the pastor's messages.

The pastor's sermon is a key influence in a guest's experience when visiting a church. A church can be welcoming and friendly to a guest, but if the guest does not sense some point of connection with what is being preached and its application to their life, then there is a greater likelihood that the guest will not return for a second or third visit. If they do return, they likely will not stay more than a few weeks or months if they do not connect in some way with the sermon. With all of the other components that make up a church worship service, the proclamation of God's Word and its application to everyday life is still a key element in the guest experience that should not be minimized.

Personal Invitation

Another finding that came to the forefront in the project research is the importance of personal invitation as a primary reason why a guest first attends a church.

In the guest survey, participants were asked to indicate what most influenced their decision to come to the church for the first time. Out of the fifteen participants who responded, four (26.7%) were "invited by a friend," three (20%) came by "word of mouth," and one (6.7%) was "invited by a relative." In the other category, three indicated they were influenced to visit the church through a friend or church connection. Two new attendees who participated in a new attendee focus group stated, "We came to church on the recommendation of a friend. We were church shopping. A friend told us to come and check it out and we did." Another person said that one of the church members invited their children to come to church. The kids really liked it, so they came as well and are still attending.

In the pastor survey, participants estimated the percentage of guests who had come to their churches due to personal invitation and word of mouth. The pastors estimated that 65.7% of guests were “invited by a friend,” 55% of guests were influenced to come to church through “word of mouth,” and 54.3% of guests were “invited by a relative.”

The most influential outreach strategy that pastors and church leaders can teach and encourage their members to do is to talk positive about their church and invite others to come. Word-of-mouth is still the most significant form of human communication. Personal invitation and positive word-of-mouth talk about a church are major influences that lead people to visit a church. When people talk about congregations as places that make people feel welcome and loved, then the church thrives (Schnase, *Radical*). According to Lifeway Research, 82% of non-church attendees indicated that they would come to church if invited by a friend (S. Long). Too often church members expect people outside the church to know they are welcome to come and visit their church, but the guests actually don’t know they are welcome and wanted. Guests are influenced by the genuineness of the people and their intentional invitation for them to be a part of their fellowship (Pohl, *Hospitality*).

Adult Connections

A fifth finding of the study relates to the importance of adults connecting with other adults when visiting a church.

The study indicated that adult classes and groups need help in the atmosphere and connections that engage new comers into the body and life of the church.

In the guest survey, 93.3% of guests identified “adult classes” as being important to their guest experience when visiting a church, but only 50% indicated that their experience was actually positive when they visited the church. This in contrast to the pastor survey where 85.7% of pastors indicated that adult classes were important to the guest experience and 84.6% estimated that a guest would have a positive experience in the adult classes in their church.

Speaking to the significance of adult connections, one new attendee focus group member stated that what was encouraging to them when she visited the church was connecting with real people rather than just watching a great worship service in a crowd or on their computer or television at home. Three other new attendee focus group participants commented that coming to the church made them feel like they were more than a number. They felt like family. They also felt a sense of belonging and contribution and usefulness.

Describing the challenge of establishing adult connections, one new attendee focus group member said, “It is hard to find a Sunday school class we fit in. It is hard going into a class that is already established. Even with name tags, we don’t know the names of a lot of people.”

The church must be intentional about building relationships (Ming). Too often adult members cocoon in small friendship circles and have difficulty inviting newcomers into these closed groups. But being hospitable is welcoming another person “into a place to which we are somehow connected - a space that has meaning and value to us” (Pohl, *Making* 201). This space can be a small group or Sunday school class. Both can be helpful in breaking down barriers, creating connections between adults and cultivating

relationships (Rainer, *Expectations* 173). When the new person sees familiar faces in this new environment and has friends who help build new relationships with others, assimilation takes place much more naturally (Arn and Arn 144).

Although the pastor has significant influence in the guest experience, as identified above, the connection process is a team effort with laity and clergy. Farr and Kotan state: “If guests only connect to the pastor, the church will never have sustained growth... Guests need to be able to connect with others in the congregation who have shared interests and experiences” (Farr and Kotan, *10 Prescriptions*, 71).

For many people coming to church is like attending someone else’s family reunion. They feel awkward, out of place and intruding. Schaller reports that one-third to one-half of Protestant church members do not experience a sense of belonging where they attend and are members. The church received them as members, but they never felt accepted into the fellowship circle. (Schaller 16-17). Insider language and closed relationships can quickly push guests and newcomers back out the door.

Every church member needs to be taught and encouraged to have open eyes and hearts to not only greet newcomers, but invite them into their friendship and care. Long states: “Above all, the most that can be done to reach the unchurched is to approach them in a relational way, with genuine friendship that brings you into their lives and, perhaps, brings them into the church and ultimately into relationship with Christ” (S. Long).

Growing Young

The sixth finding is based upon guest survey responses related to questions involving ministry to children and youth. Though the church exists for the entire body, every church needs children and youth. Their energy and passion enrich everything

around them. Powell, Mulder and Griffin describe some of the important aspects that a vital ministry to children and youth has on a church. They state: “The curiosity they bring to Scripture and the authenticity they bring to relationships keep your church’s teaching fresh and fellowship fruitful” (Powell, Mulder and Griffin 14). The church needs young people and young people need the church. The idea of growing young is not just about having better ministries to children and teenagers, it is a culture of the church that prioritizes children and young people in connecting and involving them in the heart of congregational life.

Guest survey participant responses showed that if a guest had children or teenagers in the home, then the areas related to children and youth were identified as “Very Important.” But, if the participant did not have children or teenagers in the home, the areas of children and youth were identified as “Not Applicable.” For these participants, the areas of children and/or youth had minimal or no influence upon their experience as a guest to the church. This is not to say that the participants who marked “Not Applicable” did not care about ministering to children and teenagers. It is to suggest that for guests who did not have children in their home, these areas were simply not on their “radar.” In other words, because they do not have children in the home at the time they visited the church, what ministries a church has or doesn’t have for children and teens is just not an issue of concern or awareness for these guests. This phenomenon could easily be overlooked if it was not the high percentage scoring in the “Not Applicable” column for these categories.

In contrast to the guest survey responses, pastors indicated that they thought 100% of guests would have a positive guest experience in relation to children and youth.

Between 75.5% and 85.7% of pastors indicated in the pastor survey that they thought children's and youth care and ministries were important or very important to the guest experience.

In the new attendee focus group, one group member said, "The most impactful thing for me was coming on a Wednesday night with my kids. It took ten seconds for someone to connect with my daughter. That was an instant hit for me." Three other group members stated that it was encouraging that the church brings everyone together – all ages and involves everyone in ministry. Another participant stated, "My son has found a place of belonging in the media ministry and my daughter is helping with watching kids. They love it."

In the pastor interviews, one pastor noted that "parents are encouraged, not only if their children are well cared for, but if they find the children's department, or the nursery or the youth department enjoyable and compelling." Another pastor, in thinking of the families that visit his church, stated, "If their kids hate it, or a kid or parent feels a kid is unsafe, that is a deal breaker."

Based on this finding, it is vital for pastors and church leadership to continually work to promote the importance, value and necessity of children's and youth ministries within the church and work to connect the church across generations and family status. Churches must help adults whose children are grown or who do not have any children to be aware of and connect with ministries to children and teenagers. When an adult can recognize a child's face and knows their name and something about them, that child becomes real and important to them and they are more apt to invest their time, effort and support in that child.

Children and youth ministry must be an ongoing church wide and multigenerational emphasis of a local church to reach, minister to and engage families. Pastors and churches must make regular and continuing efforts to support and be involved in children's and youth care and ministries and bridge the disconnect of these ministries with the life of the church. Schnase identifies the struggle that many churches have in this area. He says, "Too many churches want more young people so long as they act like old people, more newcomers as long as they act like old-timers, more children as long as they are as quiet as adults, more ethnic families as long as they act like the majority in the congregation" (Schnase, *Just Say Yes* 32).

If every ministry changed a little toward welcoming younger people, the cumulative effect might change the direction of the church and display radical hospitality (Schnase, *Radical*).

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This study contributes to the ongoing work of the church to reach people for Christ and engage them in the Christian life and work of the church. There are a multitude of books, seminars, podcasts and webinars on the related subjects of guest services and hospitality. While most of them focus on the guest from the view point of the church, few approach the subject from the perspective of the guest. While much of the focus of this study looked at "what worked" and "what didn't work," the goal of the study was not merely programmatic, but rather, the underlying goal was relationally motivated. That goal was that insight could be gained in how to best foster positive experiences with guests and new attendees that would influence a growing connection between them and their relationship with God, and between them and those who make up

the body of the church in its local expression. In such a context, this study provides insight in several aspects of positive and negative experiences that guests have encountered that have encouraged or discouraged their ongoing engagement with the church. To each of the areas, the church should be cognizant and responsive in order to create the most conducive atmosphere for hospitality and incorporation. While the findings of this study are not original or revolutionary to church hospitality practices, they do none the less, add to the body of knowledge and resource available in the subject area.

The findings of this study may then assist and offer guidance in the organization and training of greeting and welcoming ministries of the church. The findings may also provide insight that can be used teaching and training on hospitality to help in fostering a culture of welcome and connectedness in a church. The value of having a church culture of welcome and connectedness is expressed the attitudes and actions of the entire church and in all areas of ministry rather than being compartmentalized in the “greeting ministry” alone.

Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed in the practice of ministry:

1. Do an annual guest and hospitality inventory of the local church with those involved in the church’s greeting and welcome ministries. Look at the building and ministries through the eyes of a guest: single, married, with small children, with teenagers, senior adult.

2. Hold regular focus groups or listening sessions with recent attendees and ask them these open-ended questions: What is an example of something positive that you

experienced when you first visited our church? What negative experience(s), if any, did you have to overcome? How can our church be more guest friendly? How can our church better help new attendees engage in the life, ministry and mission of the church?

3. Hold an annual training event for everyone involved in greeting and welcome ministries. Involve church leadership and staff. Teach on key hospitality practices. Establish and train on church strategies. Invite a recent guest to share about their experience. Discuss how your church can continue to improve guest services.

4. Preach annually on the practice and culture of hospitality in the body of Christ using biblical and theological foundations. Give the congregation a short list of hospitality practices that everyone should employ regularly as part of the church.

5. Make issues of hospitality and engagement part of ongoing conversations of church staff and leadership meetings. Incorporate the goals and practices of positive guest experiences part of every ministry and program.

Though this study was focused on the mid-sized Church of the Nazarene, any insight it gives may be useful for churches of any size, makeup or affiliation. The research and findings of this study are not limited to the use or benefit of the participating churches and pastors.

Limitations of the Study

This study only considered and gained insight on positive and negative guest experiences from surveys of fourteen pastor and fifteen guest participants, personal interviews of six pastors and a new attendee focus groups made up of five people. Thirty-three pastors were invited to participate by email and personal phone call. And, an unknown number of guests, who had visited a participating church within in the previous

six months, were invited to participate by email from the participating pastor.

Opportunity for pastors and guests to participate in the survey was made available for a three-month period. Besides the personal phone calls prior to the sending of the initial email invitation to pastors, two other email invitations were sent to pastors from Nazarene Research Services. One was sent one month after the initial email and another was sent two months from the initial email invitation.

Lack of Guest Participation

A significant area of influence on the findings of this study is the gapping reality of a lack of guest survey responses out of the potential number of guests who may have been invited to participate in the research study. This research project was limited by the lack of guarantee or consistency as to whether a person who was invited to participate in the study would actually take the online survey, complete it and submit it. Invitation for participation was made by email from participating pastors. They in turn were responsible for sending an email inviting guests to participate in the research survey. Therefore, it may be that a pastor completed the pastor's survey yet failed to send out the guest survey invitation or if he or she did, the guest may have chosen not to participate. For example, one pastor communicated that he had sent email invitations to forty-three people who had visited his church within the previous six months. It is estimated that only three actually participated in the study.

Change in Procedure

Over the process of data collection one thing did change. Instead of doing a focus group of pastors, I opted to do personal phone interviews. The goal of the change was to allow more focus on the strategies and practices used in each church to retain guests,

rather than a group discussion. This change provided rich information from participating pastors.

SurveyGizmo.com

The use of SurveyGizmo as the online survey platform worked well. They are the provider of choice of Nazarene Research Services. The online survey was easy to access and use. It immediately compiled responses in a reportable format with charts and graphs. The analysis tools were very useful, though not downloadable in the visual format presented online. The raw analysis was downloadable in an excel spreadsheet format.

Improving the Instrument

After working with the online survey for pastors and guest in data collection and data analysis, an improvement of the instruments would be to shorten the survey by limiting the number of overall questions asked and greatly reducing the number of categories listed in quantitative questions. The data received was all interesting and insightful, but a reduction of questions and subcategories would better focus the instruments and data analysis.

If I Could Do It All Over Again

If I had the project to do over again I could do three things differently. First, I would limit the research subjects to a specific group of pastors and churches that met the participant criteria. To be part of this research sample, participating pastors would commit to participate in the project by taking the online survey and being part of focus group or having a personal interview. These pastors would commit to promote participation in the study to their recent guest and new attendees. And they would commit to send follow up communication to guests to encourage their participation.

The second thing I would do is to offer guest participants option to participate in a weekly gift card drawing throughout the limited duration of the study. Each participants name would be included starting the week they complete the survey. This incentive could be made available for focus group and personal interview participants as well. Offering an incentive might encourage more participation from those who had negative guest experiences and give greater depth to research findings.

A third thing that I would consider more fully would be to expand the sample base to include churches with a worship attendance of 150 and above. It is questionable whether or not the findings of this expanded group would be any different from the current subject group.

Unexpected Observations

The surprises that came up during the study were related to visitor gifts, friendliness of the pastor, parking greeters, music, children's and youth areas and positive guest responses.

Visitor Gifts

One of the unexpected surprises from the guest survey results was the low score of guests related to visitor gifts. The guest survey revealed that the welcome gift had a 37.5% positive guest experience rating and a 37.5% not applicable rating. Rating the influence or importance of a visitor gift, guests gave a very important rating of 6.7% and an unimportant rating of 53.3%. The lack of interest may be due to that fact that people today, for the most part, if they want something, they purchase it. Though most everyone likes to receive something for free, when it comes to visiting a church, it is just not that important to receive a gift. In other words, it is not a deal breaker.

Friendliness of the Pastor

Another unexpected result involves the significant ratings given to the sermon as well as the friendliness and personal contact of the pastor. This area received more comment in the written areas of the survey, pastor interviews and new attendee focus groups. As important as it is for church people to welcome and connect with guests, the pastor still has a crucial place at the table in helping to create a positive guest experience.

Guest Parking and Parking Greeters

Another unexpected result involves the areas of parking greeters as well as guest parking on the surveys. While guests rated their experiences as positive for guest parking (66.7%) and parking lot greeters (57.1%) they only 6.7% of them rated these areas as very important in influence and importance. And 26.7% rated guest parking and 33.3% rated parking lot greeters as unimportant in influence and importance. So, while these areas are added benefits for guests, they are not considered to have significant influence for many guests as to whether or not their visit was positive or negative.

Music

Another unexpected result involves the area of music. In most churches, discussions over music range from a love-hate relationship. Some long for the hymns and stylings of yesteryear and others want to be contemporary with the goal of reaching a younger audience and connecting them in worship. Though for most churches, music may be one of the areas at the top of the list, for the experience of a guest as well as its importance and influence in a positive guest experience, it rated at 73.3%. This is interpreted that music is important, but it is not as important as many other categories of

experience. Knowing this may help churches consider putting a little more focus on other key areas of influence as much as we do the music.

Children's and Youth Areas

Another unexpected result is noted as a major finding above. It involves the significance of areas related to children and youth. Although the overall percentage scores in the guest survey are low in comparison other categories, it must be noted that for a distinct group of participants the categories pertaining to children (nursery, preschool, and elementary) and youth are very significant when it came to evaluating their guest experience. This phenomenon could easily be overlooked, but for the high scores in the not applicable column for these categories. The connection between these ratings are identifiable when looking at the demographics of guest participants who do and who do not have children or teens in the home. Based on this, it is inferred that if someone doesn't have children or teens in the home, the survey points to a disconnect with the areas that pertain to these age group areas within the church.

Positive Responses

Another unexpected observance was in the positive nature of the responses of guests who participated in the survey. There were no highly negative statements at all. This may be due to the low participation in the guest survey. It may also be because those who had more negative experiences were the ones who did not respond to the invitation to participate in the survey. It may have also been that those who did not respond had a greater likelihood of not returning to the church after their visit.

Future Directions for the Study

The goal of this study has been to help churches understand what the experiences a guest may encounter when visiting a church that may have a positive or negative influence upon their further engagement with the church. Through understanding guest experiences the aim of the project was to help churches improve in at least five areas: (1) Creating an environment that would enhance the opportunities for new attendees to experience a transforming encounter with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; (2) effective retention and engagement of new attendees; (3) creating more positive experiences that would encourage ongoing church attendance and greater engagement in the life of the church; (4) reducing negative experiences for new attendees that influences disengagement; and (5) effectively using people, material and financial resources in ministering to new attendees.

Several further studies might prove helpful. Other studies may gain greater response and definitive findings using or adapting the researchers project instruments. Other studies would provide additional information that could be compared to what has been gained in this project.

A Select Subject Group

This first study would use the main instruments of this study and be conducted the with a specific group of pastors and churches who agree to be involved in the study, not only by participating in the pastor's survey, but also commit to promote participation in the study to recent guest and new attendees and to follow up on these guests to encourage fuller participation. The set grouping of churches could be of the same affiliation or they could be grouped according to geographic location. It would be interesting to see if there

were any significantly different findings if the participating churches were all committed to participating in and promoting the study.

It is further recommended that consideration be given to offering some form of encouragement for guests to participate in the study and complete the guest survey, such as to enter each participant's name in a weekly gift card drawing. Some sort of incentive could be offered for participation on focus groups and personal interviews as well.

Small Church Study

A second study might be conducted using the main instruments of this research project with smaller churches with worship attendance of less than 250. A random sample of churches could be selected in a broad area or a specific grouping of churches could be recruited for participation. The results would compare whether church size does or does not affect the findings

Practices of Engagement

The third study might focus on what are the most effective practices of engagement and discipleship of new attendees as measured by growing spiritual maturity and active involvement in the mission and ministry of the church. This study could be based on church size. Does having a formal or informal process of engagement and discipleship affect the results of this measurement? If so, what kinds of processes are most effective?

Influences that Lead to Ongoing Attendance

Finally, a suggested study might identify the influences that lead a person to visit a church for the first time and how those influence have any ongoing affect in future

engagement in the church. This study could help a church better understand what influences that cause a person to visit a church affect or don't affect further engagement.

Review of the Chapter

This chapter has sought to bring together all of the different project components seeking to identify the positive and negatives experiences that guests have that encourages or discourages ongoing attendance. It is the culmination of biblical reflection, literature review, data collection and data analysis. Churches that retained new attendees had the following characteristics: a welcoming and friendly culture; intentional engagement of regular attendees with guests and newcomers; personal contact by a pastor; and engaging sermons. This study also underlined the significance of personal invitation and word of mouth positive talk about a church that influences a person to visit a church; the need of adult classes or groups to engage newcomers and emphasizing and integrating children's and youth ministries into the total life of the church in a way that crosses multi-generational boundaries and connects families of all ages and make up. The word that seems to summarize the findings of this study is connectedness: connectedness of the guest with a welcoming culture; connectedness of the guest with God's Word through the pastor's sermon and Bible teaching; connectedness of the guest with the pastor where there is some sense of personal relationship or bond; connectedness of the guest with children or teenagers through multigenerational support and relationships; and connectedness of the guest with the life of the church outside the Sunday morning or worship experience through follow up and personal engagement. This chapter also includes a description of ministry implications, limitations of the study, unexpected

observations and recommendations for further study. The chapter ends with a reflection on my journey in doing this research.

Postscript

This study confirmed in the results found in Chapter 2 regarding the importance of hospitality, guest experience, engagement, interpersonal relationships, retention and attrition in the engagement of new attendees in the church. The literature review gave a breadth and depth of understanding of the multi-facets of hospitality, engagement, guest experience, intentional relationships, retention and attrition. The Bible is replete with examples and guidance on helping and connecting with others as well as stories of negative examples and teachings that warn, reprimand and correct. As I reflected on this study, the questions and responses on positive and negative experiences were very insightful. The study has also uncovered additional characteristics not expected in the literature review.

In this research I had the privilege of interviewing wonderful pastors who love God and love people and want to do all they can to help their churches be effective in welcoming and engaging new people into their fellowships. It was a privilege to listen to the stories of new attendees and here the encouraging experiences that influenced them to continue to engage with a church as well as the discouraging experiences that they had to overcome.

The completion of this study is a major endeavor and accomplishment for me. Writing on guest experience was challenging and insightful. In truth there were multiple times when I was on the edge of giving up and walking away from the project at each stage: research, data collection and especially analysis. I wish I could say that the project

was a natural outpouring of the knowledge and insight I gained in the research, but it was more in line with mining for ore, one stone at a time and then still having to refine the ore to something of use. The project has challenged me deeply in my personal discipline and ability to focus and reason. How am I different? The project has stretched me like no other project ever has. It has reshaped my boundaries of thought and experience. The depth of effect is yet to be grasped at this time.

This project, the process of completing it and the findings has helped me understand my local context better and the people with whom we minister and reinforced my passion to reach people for Christ and help connect them to His Church. It has increased my burden and compassion for those who visit a church for the first time or have visited several times and still can't find a connection. It has challenged me to lead our church and staff in developing a culture of hospitality, instead of focusing only on the practices and programs of hospitality. In the local church, the busyness of service preparations, or the service order, or the preparing to preach and perform my roles and duties as pastor can overshadow the need to be real, kind and welcoming to guests and regular attendees alike.

Through the history of the church, the stranger has found a place of welcome; the lost have found a place of home; the needy have found a place of help; and the sinner has found a place, a people and a God of grace. I believe now more than ever that the church should be a place of welcome, acceptance and belonging for any guest who enters the door and the community who opens its heart and life to the work of God through His Spirit and His body, the church.

No matter what brings people to visit a church for the first time – looking for a new church home, being invited by a friend or getting a recommendation from someone, sensing a need for spiritual connection, or being new to an area, every person is valuable and worth receiving a positive guest experience that encourages their faith and helps them connect with people who love God and love them. With this hope and goal, the church can continue to be a place of welcome, grace and transformation.

APPENDIX A: Dissertation Matrix: Overview

DISSERTATION MATRIX: ALAN E. JOHNSON							
FROM ENTRANCE TO ENGAGEMENT: EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT NEW ATTENDEES IN A FAITH COMMUNITY							
What am I puzzled about?		Who else is puzzled?	What is my hunch about it?	What will I do about it?	What do I know now?		
Chapter 1		Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 8	
Overarching Question	Specific Research Questions	Research Objectives	Supporting Theories	Data Collection Methods	Analysis of Data	Interpretation of Data	Report
What are the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in representative mid-sized Churches of the Nazarene with an average worship attendance of 250 to 999 in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas.	RQ1 What are the strategies and practices that churches actively utilize to retain new attendees?	RO1 To help churches create a conducive environment for new attendees to experience a transforming encounter with Jesus Christ as Lord and	Biblical and Theological Foundations related to research focus.	Qualitative and Quantitative mix-methods.	Initial coding built into the questionnaire; word searches that will yield common characteristics.	Primary interpretive means will be the application of findings of research instruments.	Restatement of research purpose and objectives.
	RQ2 What are the experiences that new church attendees identify that encourage ongoing attendance and engagement?	RO2 To help churches be more effective in the retention and engagement of new attendees.		Online surveys of pastors, guests and new attendees.	Initial coding built into the questionnaire which will be compiled and detailed in a computer generated report via graphs/charts; profiles will be cross-referenced to other RQ's		Report of the results and observations from the research.
	RQ3 What are the experiences that new church attendees have that discourage ongoing attendance and engagement?	RO3 To help churches create positive experiences that would encourage ongoing church attendance and greater engagement in the life of the church.	Literature Review to focus on areas of Hospitality, Guest Experience, Engagement, Interpersonal Relationships, Guest Retention and Attrition.	Focus groups of new attendees from selected churches and areas.	Analysis of pastor and guest surveys, guest focus groups and pastor interviews.	Secondary interpretive means will be the application of principles from biblical texts on guest experience, and principles from studies in current trends in church guest experiences.	Ideas for further study.
	RQ4 What are the most effective strategies and practices that the mid-sized church can utilize to retain new attendees?	RO4 To help churches reduce negative experiences for new attendees.		Personal Interviews of pastors in selected churches and areas.	Charts and graphs of surveys, interviews and focus group results.		
		RO5 To help churches be effective in the use of people, material and financial resources in ministering to new attendees.			Summary of Findings.		

APPENDIX B: Pastor Introductory Email Template

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO PASTORS

Dear Pastor:

I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of my research is to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in USA Nazarene churches with an average attendance of 250 to 999.

Your church has been selected as a participant with the permission, help and support of the Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center.

I am asking for your help in two ways:

- 1) Please complete the pastors' survey yourself.
- 2) Please forward the guest survey invitation below by email to the guests who have visited your church within the past six months.

Participants for both the pastor's survey and guest survey must be 18 years of age or older, and be willing to participate. Participants will be asked to click on a link and complete the brief survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes or less to complete the Instructions listed. Participation will be completely confidential.

To participate, please complete the pastors' survey yourself and then forward the below information via email to guests who have visited your church within the past six months.

If you have any questions, please contact me by email (ajohnson@rogersfirst.com) or by phone (Cell: 479-531-7020; Office: 479-636-1050).

Thank you again for your willingness to participate and invite your recent guests to be a part of this important study. *The success of this study is dependent upon your participation.*

Sincerely,

Rev. Alan E. Johnson

Facilitated by Research Services
Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center
research@nazarene.org

Click Here to go to the Pastor's Consent Page and Survey
<http://surveys.nazarene.org/s3/AJohnsonPastor>

NEXT, PLEASE FORWARD THE FOLLOWING TEXT TO ALL AREA GUESTS WHO HAVE VISITED YOUR CHURCH WITHIN THE PAST SIX MONTHS:

SUBJECT: Guest Survey Concerning Your Recent Church Visit

Dear Recent Guest to [name] Church of the Nazarene:

You are invited to participate in an important study on church guest experiences.

Alan E. Johnson is conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of the research is to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in mid-sized to large Churches of the Nazarene.

As a participant, you must be 18 years of age or older, have attended a Church of the Nazarene within the past six months, and are willing to participate. You will be asked to click on a link, consent to participate in the study and complete a 20 question survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes or less to complete the instructions listed. Your participation and responses will be completely confidential.

Please click the following link (or copy and paste it into your web browser) to start: <http://surveys.nazarene.org/s3/GuestSurvey>. A consent document containing additional information about the study is provided as the first page you will see after you click on the link. Choose the appropriate consent option at end of the information indicating your consent to take part in the study. Then click "Next" to begin the survey.

Thank you for your help in this important study.

Sincerely,

Rev. Alan E. Johnson
ajohnson@rogersfirst.com

APPENDIX C: Pastor Introductory Follow-up Email Template

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL TO SELECTED CHURCHES

Subject: Study on the Experiences that Encourage or Discourage Ongoing Attendance and Engagement of Guests and New Attendees in USA Nazarene Churches

Dear [Pastor]

These are busy days with demands resulting from District and General Assemblies and church summer events. All of lives seem busier than we would like them to be. In our busyness it is easy to put aside things like surveys for studies being conducted.

I hope that you did indeed receive the survey link sent to you several weeks ago. If you responded, thank you. If not, the survey information may not have reached you or has slipped from your attention. I appeal to your participation in the study. The success of this study is dependent on your participation.

Many pastors have responded to the initial request. Your response is valuable to help strengthen our understanding of the subject area. It is not too late to respond. To participate, please go to the following site:

<http://surveys.nazarene.org/s3/AjohnsonPastor>.

After you take the survey, then copy and forward the email below to guests who have visited your church within the past six or more months. The survey is completely confidential.

If you have any questions, please contact me (email, ajohnson@rogersfirst.com; cell phone, 479-531-7020; or church office, 479-636-1050). Your help is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Alan E. Johnson

Doctor of Ministry Candidate, Asbury Theological Seminary

HERE IS THE EMAIL YOU CAN COPY AND SEND TO GUESTS WHO HAVE VISITED YOUR CHURCH WITHIN THE PAST SIX OR MORE MONTHS:

SUBJECT: Guest Survey Concerning Your Recent Church Visit

Dear Guest,

Would you take a few minutes of your time and participate in an important research study that is being done on church guest experiences? The research study is part of a Doctoral research project by Alan Johnson through Asbury Theological Seminary.

The purpose of the research is to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in mid-sized Churches of the Nazarene.

Because you were a guest at a Church of the Nazarene within the past several months, your input will be invaluable. Be assured that your participation and responses will be completely confidential. The survey is made up of 20 questions and will take about 10 minutes to complete.

Please click on the following link (or copy and paste it into your web browser) to start: <http://surveys.nazarene.org/s3/GuestSurvey>. The first page you will see after clicking on the link is a consent document containing overview information on the study. Please choose the appropriate consent option at the end of the information indicating your consent to take part in the study. Then click "Next" to begin the survey.

I sincerely thank you for your help in this important study.

Grace and Peace,

[YOUR CHURCH NAME HERE]

Thank you again for your help in this important study.

Grace and Peace,

Alan E. Johnson

Doctor of Ministry Candidate, Asbury Theological Seminary
ajohnson@rogersfirst.com

Facilitated by Research Services, Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center
research@nazarene.org

APPENDIX D: Pastor Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PASTORS

From Entrance to Engagement:
Experiences that Connect New Attendees in a Faith Community
Alan E. Johnson
Asbury Theological Seminary
Doctor of Ministry Program

You are invited to be in a research study of church guest experiences. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 or older, and are a pastor of a Church of the Nazarene located in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas or Missouri with an average worship attendance of 250 to 999. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Rev. Alan E. Johnson, a doctoral student at Asbury Theological Seminary, is conducting this study.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in a church.

Instructions: If you agree to be in this study, you are asked to do the following things:

1. Choose the appropriate consent option at the bottom of the page and type your name.
2. Click "NEXT" to start the survey.
3. Respond to 23 questions (approximately 15 minutes).
4. Click "SUBMIT" at the end of the survey.

Risks and Benefits: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. It is hoped that this study will help churches create more positive experiences and reduce negative experiences for guests and new attendees so as to provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return, engage in the life of the church and encounter the life-transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Participation in the study is completely confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. There will be no attempt to identify individual participants or responses.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary and can be ended at any time. There are no right and wrong responses. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you can choose to stop the survey or skip any questions you desire. At the

end of the survey you will have the option of participating in a focus group to discuss the study topic further.

Questions: You may ask any questions you have now by contacting the researcher. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact the research at ajohnson@rogersfirst.com.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers.



Yes, I consent to participate in the study.

[_____]

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study



No, I do not wish to participate.

NEXT

APPENDIX E: Pastor Online Survey Template

SURVEY FOR PASTORS

INFORMED CONSENT

1. **Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers.
Yes, I consent to participate in this study.
No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHURCH

2. Average weekend worship attendance:
[_____]
3. Estimated number of guests over the past six months:
[_____]
4. Estimated number of guests each Sunday:
[_____]
5. Estimated number of guests over the past six months who continue to attend:
[_____]

TELL US ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS

6. Please evaluate the experience a first time guest might have at your church. To what extent do you think their experience or impression as a guest is negative or positive in the each of the following areas:

	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Somewhat Negative</i>	<i>Somewhat Positive</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Church Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clearly Identified Entrance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guest Parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking Lot Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Door Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Desk / Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sermon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General Sense of Welcome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to Information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessibility to Restrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to the Guest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to Each Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of the Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness of the Facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inside Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Check-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nursery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Care / Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Children's Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visitor Gift	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Letter / Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Church Member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall Experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. How influential or important do you think the following areas are to the positive experience of a guest at your church?

	<i>Unimportant</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Church Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clearly Identified Entrance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guest Parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking Lot Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Door Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Desk / Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sermon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General Sense of Welcome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access of Information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessibility to Restrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to the Guest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to Each Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of the Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness of the Facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inside Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Check-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nursery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Care / Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visitor Gift	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Letter / Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Church Member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall Experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. What experience do you think is the most encouraging to a guest?

[_____]

9. What experience, if any, do you think could be the most discouraging to a guest?

[_____]

10. How could your church improve the guest experience?

[_____]

11. What percentage of guests come to your church based on the following influences?

Invited by a Friend	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Invited by a Relative	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Word of Mouth	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
The Church Website	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Church Signage	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Church Advertisement	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
The Church Building	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
The Pastor	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Living near the Church	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Attending a Special Event	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Attending a Small Group	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Other: _____	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%

12. What percentage of guests come to your church with the following church experiences? (Rate each item)

Lifelong Participant in Church	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Attend only on Holidays	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Haven't been Going for Some Time	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Never been to Church	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Started attending after Married	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Started attending after having Children	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Started attending after a Crisis	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Been hurt in a Church	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Looking for a New Church	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Other: _____	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%

13. After guests visit the church and do not return, what percentage do you think visit another church?

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

14. If a guest returns to the church, what would you say is the most significant reason why?

15. If a guest does not return to the church, what would say is the most significant reason why not?

16. Has your church had guests in the past six months who were recommended by previous guests?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 Maybe ☐

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF**17. What is your gender?**

Female ☐
 Male ☐

18. What is your current marital status?

Single, never married ☐
 Single, after divorce or widow(ed) ☐

- In First Marriage ☐
- Remarried after divorce, widow(ed) ☐

19. What is your age?

- 18-24 ☐
- 25-34 ☐
- 35-44 ☐
- 45-54 ☐
- 55-64 ☐
- 65-74 ☐
- 75 or order ☐

20. Do you have any children living at home? (Please mark all that apply)

- No ☐
- Yes, age 5 or younger ☐
- Yes, age 6 to 12 ☐
- Yes, age 13 to 18 ☐
- Yes, age 19 or older ☐

21. What type of community do you live in?

- Urban ☐
- Suburban ☐
- Small Town ☐
- Rural ☐

22. Please use this space to share any additional comments not covered by this survey.

[_____]

23. Would you like to receive a report of the study's results?

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

24. Final Question: Would you be willing to participate in a focus group or phone interview to gather specific information about your church's guest experience for this study? **If yes**, please provide the following information.

Your Name: _____

Church Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Best time to Call: _____

Email: _____

SUBMIT

Thank you for taking our survey! Your confidential responses will provide valuable help in our study of positive and negative guest experiences of first time guests.

APPENDIX F: Guest Introductory Email Template

INVITATION EMAIL TO GUESTS

THE FOLLOWING TEXT IS TO BE EMAILED BY PASTORS TO ALL AREA GUESTS WHO HAVE VISITED THEIR CHURCH WITHIN THE PAST SIX MONTHS:

SUBJECT: Guest Survey Concerning Your Recent Church Visit

Dear Recent Guest to [name] Church of the Nazarene:

You are invited to participate in an important study on church guest experiences.

Alan E. Johnson is conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of the research is to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in mid-sized to large Churches of the Nazarene.

As a participant, you must be 18 years of age or older, have attended a Church of the Nazarene within the past six months, and are willing to participate. You will be asked to click on a link, consent to participate in the study and complete a 20 question survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes or less to complete the instructions listed. Your participation and responses will be completely confidential.

Please click the following link (or copy and paste it into your web browser) to start: <http://surveys.nazarene.org/s3/GuestSurvey>. A consent document containing additional information about the study is provided as the first page you will see after you click on the link. Choose the appropriate consent option at end of the information indicating your consent to take part in the study. Then click "Next" to begin the survey.

Thank you for your help in this important study.

Sincerely,

Rev. Alan E. Johnson
ajohnson@rogersfirst.com

APPENDIX G: Guest Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR GUESTS AND NEW ATTENDEES

From Entrance to Engagement:

Experiences that Connect New Attendees in a Faith Community

Alan E. Johnson

Asbury Theological Seminary

Doctor of Ministry Program

You are invited to be in a research study of church guest experiences. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 or older, and you visited a Church of the Nazarene within the past six months. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Rev. Alan E. Johnson, a doctoral student at Asbury Theological Seminary, is conducting this study.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify the primary experiences that encourage or discourage ongoing attendance and engagement of guests and new attendees in a church.

Instructions: If you agree to be in this study, you are asked to do the following things:

1. Choose the appropriate consent option at the bottom of the page and type your name.
2. Click "NEXT" to start the survey.
3. Respond to 20 questions (approximately 15 minutes).
4. Click "SUBMIT" at the end of the survey.

Risks and Benefits: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. It is hoped that this study will help churches create more positive experiences and reduce negative experiences for guests and new attendees so as to provide greater encouragement and openness for them to return, engage in the life of the church and encounter the life-transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Participation in the study is completely confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. There will be no attempt to identify individual participants or responses.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary and can be ended at any time. There are no right and wrong responses. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you can choose to stop the survey or skip any questions you desire. At the

end of the survey you will have the option of participating in a focus group to discuss the study topic further.

Questions: You may ask any questions you have now by contacting the researcher. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact the research at ajohnson@rogersfirst.com.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers.



Yes, I consent to participate in the study.

[_____]

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study



No, I do not wish to participate.

NEXT

APPENDIX H: Guest Online Survey Template

FIRST TIME GUEST SURVEY

INFORMED CONSENT

1. **Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers.**
Yes, I consent to participate in this study.
No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE

2. **Please evaluate your experience as a first time guest at the Church of the Nazarene within the past six months. To what extent was your experience or impression as a guest negative or positive in the each of the following areas:**

	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Somewhat Negative</i>	<i>Somewhat Positive</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Church Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clearly Identified Entrance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guest Parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking Lot Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Door Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Desk / Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sermon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General Sense of Welcome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to Information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessibility to Restrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to you as Guest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to Each Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of the Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness of the Facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inside Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Check-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nursery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Care / Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visitor Gift	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Letter / Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Church Member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall Experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. How influential or important are the following areas to you and your experience as a guest at the church?

	<i>Unimportant</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Church Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clearly Identified Entrance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guest Parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking Lot Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Door Greeters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Desk / Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sanctuary Greeters / Ushers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sermon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General Sense of Welcome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access of Information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessibility to Restrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to you as Guest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of People to Each Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of the Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness of the Facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inside Signage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Check-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nursery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool Care / Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visitor Gift	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome Letter / Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Pastor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact by a Church Member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall Experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What experience stood out as the most encouraging to you?

[_____]

5. What experience, if any, stood out as the most discouraging to you?

[_____]

6. How could the church improve the guest experience?

[_____]

7. What most influenced you to come to this church in the first place? (Please select one)

- Invited by a Friend ☐
- Invited by a Relative ☐
- Word of Mouth ☐
- The Church Website ☐
- Church Signage / Marquee ☐
- Church Advertisement ☐
- The Church Building ☐
- The Pastor ☐
- I Live Nearby ☐

I attended a Special Event ☐
 I attended a Small Group ☐
 Other: _____ ☐

8. Before coming to this church, what was your Church Experience? (Please mark all that apply)

Lifelong Participant in Church ☐
 Attend only on Holidays ☐
 Haven't been Going for Some Time ☐
 Never Been to Church ☐
 Started attending after Married ☐
 Started attending after Having Children ☐
 Started attending after a Crisis ☐
 Been Hurt in a Church ☐
 Looking for a New Church ☐
 Other: _____ ☐

9. After your first visit, did you visit the church again?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 Still thinking about it ☐

10. After your first visit, did you visit another church?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 Still thinking about it ☐

11. If you did visit the church again, are you still attending?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 Still thinking about it ☐

12. If YES, what would you say is the most significant reason why?

13. If NO, what would say is the most significant reason why not?

14. Would you recommend this church to your family and friends?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 Still thinking about it ☐

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF (DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION)

15. What is your gender?

Female ☐
 Male ☐

16. What is your current marital status?

Single, never married ☐
 Single after divorce or widow(ed) ☐
 In First Marriage ☐
 Remarried after divorce, widow(ed) ☐

17. What is your age?

APPENDIX I: New Attendee Focus Group Questions

NEW ATTENDEE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Demographic Information:

Gender, Age Range, Length of Time Attending Current Church, Current Church

Involvement

Semi-Structured Discussion Questions:

1. What brought you to this church the first time you visited?
2. What is an example of an encouraging experience you had when you first visited this church?
3. What discouraging experience(s), if any, did you have that you had to overcome?
4. Have you had discouraging experiences in other churches you have visited? If so, what happened?
5. For those of you who are still attending this church, what kept you here? What experience(s) did you have that encouraged your ongoing engagement with the church?

APPENDIX J: Pastor Interview Questions

PASTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information:

Gender, Age Range, Length of Current Pastorate

Semi-Structured Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think would be considered encouraging experiences that a guest would have when they visit your church?
2. What could be a discouraging experience that a newcomer might have that could discourage them from returning or further engaging with your church?
3. For those who are new to your church over the previous six months, what do you think, kept them there? What were the positive experiences they had that encouraged ongoing engagement with your church?
4. What does your church do in order to welcome first-time guests?
5. What are the strategies and practices that your church actively utilizes to encourage guests to return?
6. What have been the most effective strategies and practices that your church has utilized that have resulted in guests returning?

WORKS CITED

- Achtemeier, Paul. *Romans*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.
- Adams, Bob. "Disney Expects Guests – What About You?" 23 August 2016.
<http://guestexperiencedesign.com/disney-expects-guests/>.
- . "Engagement with Guests Starts with the Message." *Guest Experience Design*. 16 January 2018. <http://guestexperiencedesign.com/engagement-with-guests-starts-with-the-message/>.
- . "The Guiding Principles of Guest Experiences, Part 1: Definition." 12 November 2013. <https://27gen.com/2013/11/12/the-guiding-principles-of-guest-experiences-part-1/>.
- . "The Guiding Principles of Guest Experiences, Part 2: Purpose." 13 November 2013. <https://27gen.com/2013/11/13/the-guiding-principles-of-guest-experiences-part-2/>.
- . "Just Exactly When Does Engagement Happen?" 25 January 2018.
<http://guestexperiencedesign.com/just-exactly-when-does-engagement-happen/>
- . "Seven Strategic Questions Critical to Improving Your Church's Guest Experience." 30 November 2012. <https://27gen.com/2012/11/30/seven-strategic-questions-critical-to-improving-your-churchs-guest-experience/>.
- . "Understanding the Different Levels of Engagement. 2 February 2018.
<http://guestexperiencedesign.com/welcome-to-guest-experience-design/>.

Arn, Win, and Charles Arn. *The Master's Plan of Making Disciples: Every Christian an Effective Witness through an Enabling Church*. 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

Attebery, Philip W. *Describing the Assimilation Experiences of New Converts: A Phenomenological Study*. 2014. Dallas Baptist University D. Min. Dissertation. ProQuest (3666453).

Blomberg, Craig. *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. NIV Application Commentary.

Bocock, David C. *Effective Membership Assimilation: Developing a Process by Which Adult New Members Are Purposefully Integrated into the Full Life of the Congregation*. 2011. Drew University, D. Min. Dissertation. ProQuest (3462594).

Bonifacio, Joey. *The Lego Principle*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2012.

Brinton, Henry G. *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2012. eBook Collection (EBSCO Host).

Clowney, Edmund. *The Message of 1 Peter*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1988. The Bible Speaks Today.

Crabb, Larry. "Forward" *The Connecting Church* by Randy Frazee, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Detter, Alfred L. *The Assessment of Newcomer Assimilation and the Development of an Assimilation Model at Grace Baptist Church*. 1989. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, D. Min. Dissertation. TREN Id: 006-0414.

Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 9-16*. Dallas: Word, 1988. Word Biblical Commentary.

Durey, David D. *Attracting and Assimilating the Unchurched in the 21st Century*. 2002.

Asbury Theological Seminary, D. Min. Dissertation. ProQuest (3045816).

Farr, Bob and Kay Kotan *10 Prescriptions for the Healthy Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015.

Farr, Bob, Doug Anderson, and Kay Kotan. "Connecting with Visitors." *Ministry Matters* 25 July 2013. <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4070/connecting-with-visitors>.

---. *Get Their Name: Grow Your Church by Building New Relationships*. Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2013.

Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

Frazee, Randy. *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Gaebelein, Frank E., general editor. *Ephesians through Philemon*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981. Expositor's Bible Commentary.

---, general editor. *Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976. Expositor's Bible Commentary.

Galloway, Dale E. "Everyone Wants to Feel Like a Somebody." *NET Results Magazine*, July-August 2007. www.netresults.org.

George, Fred Anthony. *An Assimilation Effort: Developing A Plan to Move First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of First Baptist Church Atlanta*. 2015. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, D. Min. Dissertation. ProQuest (3663941).

- Gould, Scott. *The Shape of Engagement: The Art of Building Enduring Connections with Your Customers, Employees and Communities*. Self Published, 2017.
- Greathouse, William M., et al. *Beacon Bible Commentary: Volume VIII, Romans, I and II Corinthians*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1968.
- Hare, Douglas R.A. *Matthew*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.
- Harre, Alan F. *Close the Back Door: Ways to Create a Caring Congregational Fellowship*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1984.
- Hays, Rita. "Welcoming Visitors with Children." *Circuit Rider: New Places for New People*, Feb/Mar/Apr 2010.
- <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/766/welcoming-visitors-with-children>.
- Hershberger, Michele. *A Christian View of Hospitality, Expecting Surprises*. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1999.
- Houts, Ken. *You are a Miracle Waiting to Happen!* Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House/Destiny Image, 1996
- Hugenot Jerrod. "Welcome to Our Church (We Hope!)." *Ministry Matters* 6 January 2014. <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4611/welcome-to-our-church-we-hope>.
- Hunter, George G. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*. Kindle ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.
- . *Church for the Unchurched*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.
- , editor. *The Pastor's Guide to Growing a Christlike Church*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2004.

Hux, Earl Ralph. *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Assimilation Strategies of the Churches of Christ in Christian Union: Closing the Back Door of the Church*. 2011.

Asbury Theological Seminary, D. Min. Dissertation.

Jeambey, Robert W. "Why do People Leave Congregations?" *Leadership Network*.

<http://www.leadnet.org>.

Kelley, Jessica Miller. "Invitation is Everyone's Job." *Ministry Matters*. 6 Sept. 2012.

<http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3217/invitation-is-everyones-job>.

Kennon, Callahan L. *Effective Church Leadership on the Twelve Keys*. San Francisco:

Harper & Row, 1990.

Lane, William L. *Hebrews 9-13*. Dallas: Word Books, 1991. Word Biblical Commentary.

Lawless, Chuck. *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member*

Classes and Assimilation. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

Long, Stacy. "When Some Become None." *American Family Association Journal*,

February 2015, p. 14. Publication of the American Family Association.

Long, Thomas G. *Hebrews*. Louisville KY, John Knox Press, 1997. *Interpretation, A*

Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.

Lowe, Anthony. *New Member Assimilation for the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church*. 2011.

Drew University, D.Min. Dissertation. ProQuest (3462606).

Lucas, R.C. *The Message of Colossians and Philemon*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity,

1980. The Bible Speaks Today.

Mallory, Sue and Brad Smith, *The Equipping Church Guidebook*. Grand Rapids:

Zondervan, 2001

Malphurs, Aubrey. *Strategic Disciple Making*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.

Marty, Peter W. "Reversing Unwelcoming Welcome Habits." *Hospitality: Making a Great First Impression. NET Results*, July/August 2006. www.netresults.org.

Maxwell, John C. *Developing the Leaders Around You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995.

McIntosh, Gary L. *Beyond the First Visit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006.

---. *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003.

---. *Growing God's Church*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992.

McIntosh, Gary L. and Glen Martin. *Finding Them and Keeping Time: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1991.

McKinney, J. "New-member assimilation." *Discipleship: The Best Writing from the Most Experienced Disciple Makers*, edited by Billie Hanks, Jr. and William A. Shell, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993, pp.79-90.

Merriam-Webster.com. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/engagement>.

Ming, J. Melvin. "Helping Outsiders Become Insiders." *Enrichment Journal Q3*, Summer 1999. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199903/042_outsiders.cfm.

Moore, Frank. *More Coffee Shop Theology*, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1998.

Musselman, Scott. "Hospitality that Transforms Lives." *The Effective Church Group*. <http://churchhospitality.us/hospitality-that-transforms-lives/>.

Myers, Joseph. *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*. Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan, 2003.

Newman, Elizabeth. "Untamed Hospitality." *Hospitality: Christian Reflections, A Series in Faith and Ethics*. Baylor University, 2007, pp. 11-19

<https://www.baylor.edu/IFL/index.php?id=937688>.

Obst, Patricia, and Naomi Tham. "Helping the Soul: The Relationship between Connectivity and Well-Being within a Church Community." *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 37, no. 3, Apr. 2009, pp. 342-61. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/jcop.20299.

Oord, Thomas and Michael Lodahl. *Relational Holiness*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005.

Orjala, Paul R. "Assimilating Ethnic and Other Minorities into the Local Church." <http://docplayer.net/40952120-Defining-assimilation.html>.

Osborne, Larry. *Sticky Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.

Oswald, Roy M., and Speed B. Leas. *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation*. The Alban Institute, 1987.

OxfordDictionaries.com. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/engagement>.

Ozier, Jim and Fiona Haworth. *Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2014.

Perry, Christopher W. Be Our Guest. "Hospitality: Taking it to the Next Level". *NET Results Magazine*. Nov-Dec 2011, pp. 7-10. www.NetResults.org.

Peters, Tim. "6 Ways to Follow Up with First-Time Guests." *Outreach Magazine*, 3 August 2015. <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/5144-6-ways-to-follow-up-with-first-time-guests.html>.

---. "Are You Scaring Off First-Time Guests?" *Outreach Magazine*, 26 February 2015.

<http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/5116-are-you-scaring-off-first-time-guests.html?>

Pineda, Ana Maria. Quoted in "Hospitality." *Practicing Our Faith*.

<http://www.practicingourfaith.org/hospitality>.

Pohl, Christine. "Grace enters with the stranger." *Faith and Leadership*, 23 November

2010. <http://www.faithandleadership.com/multimedia/christine-d-pohl-grace-enters-the-stranger>.

---. Hospitality, "A Practice and a Way of Life." *Vision: A Journal for Church and*

Theology, Spring 2002, pp. 34-43. www.MennoVision.com.

---. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI:

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to*

Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016.

Ranier, Thom S. *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*.

Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993.

---. *Effective Evangelistic Churches*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996.

---. *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church*.

Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999.

---. *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*. Grand

Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001. Print.

- Ranier, Thom S. and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006.
- Ranier, Thom S. and Sam Rainer. *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008.
- Robinson, Darrell W. *Total Church Life: How to Be a First Century Church in the 21st Century World*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997.
- Rose, Steven M. *Breaking the Growth Barrier at Muskogee First Assembly: Assimilation and Developing Community through Small Group Ministry*. 2009. Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, D.Min. Dissertation. ProQuest (305168700).
- Schaller, Lyle E. *Creative Leadership Series: Assimilating New Members*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1978.
- Schnase, Robert. *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. Kindle ed., Nashville: Abingdon, 2007.
- . *Just Say Yes! Unleashing People for Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2015.
- . *Radical Hospitality: "The First Practice of Fruitful Congregations" Circuit Rider: Opening the Door* Nov/Dec/Jan 2008-2009.
- <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/518/radical-hospitality-the-first-practice-of-fruitful-congregations>.
- Scott, Robin B. *Increasing Assimilation and Decreasing Attrition Through the Development of a Lay Ministry and Congregational Care Program*. 2001. Asbury Theological Seminary, D. Min. Dissertation.
- Searcy, Nelson with Jennifer Dykes Henson. *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church*. Kindle ed., Ventura, CA: Regal. 2007.

- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011.
- Sjogren, Steve. *Making a Good Church Great: Becoming a Community God Calls His Home*. Ventura: Regal, 2010.
- Smith, D. Moody. *First, Second, and Third John*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991.
- Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.
- Sorensen, Paul. "Assimilating Newcomers at Community Church of Joy." *Net Results Magazine*, September 1996. www.NetResults.org.
- Stetzer, Ed and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can, Too*. Broadman and Holman Books, 2007.
- Stewart, Teena M. *Successful Small Groups: From Concept to Practice*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2007.
- Stott, John R.W. *The Message of Ephesians*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1979. The Bible Speaks Today.
- Strauch, Alexander. *The Hospitality Command: Building Loving Christian Community*. Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1993.
- Stutzman, Ervin R. *Welcome! A Biblical and Practical Guide to Receiving New Members*. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1990.
- Tenny-Brittian, Bill. "5 Critical Hospitality Mistakes." *The Effective Church Group*. <http://churchhospitality.us/5-critical-hospitality-mistakes/>.
- . "Connections Part 1: Turning Visitors Into Committed Members." *Net Results Magazine*. Mar-Apr 2012. www.netresults.org.

- . "Connections Part 2: Turning Visitors Into Committed Members". *Net Results Magazine*. Mar-Apr 2012. www.netresults.org.
- . "First Impressions." *Net Results Magazine*. Jul-Aug 2011. www.netresults.org.
- Tenney, Merrill C., editor. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 2, D-G. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.
- . *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 3, H-L. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.
- Toler, Stan, and Alan Nelson. *The Five Star Church: Helping Your Church Provide the Highest Level of Service to God and His People*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999.
- Trueblood, Elton. *The Incendiary Fellowship*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.
- Vanier, Jean. *Community and Growth*, rev. ed. New York: Paulist Press, 1989. 266-7.
- Wadell, Paul J. "Toward a Welcoming Congregation." *Hospitality: Christian Reflections, A Series in Faith and Ethics*. Baylor University, 2007. 75-83.
- <https://www.baylor.edu/IFL/index.php?id=937688>.
- Waltz, Mark L. *First Impressions: Creating Wow Experiences in Your Church*. Revised ed. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2013.
- Warren, Rick. *The Purposed Driven Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995.
- Weem, Jr, Lovett H. "Newcomers: Changes Congregations Are Facing Today." 24 June 2014. <http://wesley21.com/changes-congregations-are-facing>.
- Wesley, John. *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966.
- Wiley, H. Orton. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1984.
- Williamson, Rick. *1, 2, & 3 John*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2010. New Beacon Bible Commentary.

Willis, Dustin and Brandon Clements. *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life*. Chicago: Moody, 2017.

Wood, Shawn. "The Need to Belong." 18 July 2011.

<http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1439/the-need-to-belong>.

WORKS CONSULTED

Adams, Bob. "The 3rd Discipline of Guest Experiences: Design." 24 November 2014.

<https://27gen.com/2014/11/24/the-3rd-discipline-of-guest-experiences-design/>.

---. "What is Your Share of Your Guest's Mind during a Guest Experience?" 13

November 2012. <https://27gen.com/2012/11/13/what-is-your-share-of-your-guests-mind-during-a-guest-experience/>.

---. "Understanding the Different Levels of Engagement." 2 February 2018.

<http://guestexperiencedesign.com/understanding-the-different-levels-of-engagement/>.

Arterbury, Andrew. "Entertaining Angels from Hospitality," *Hospitality: Christian Reflections, A Series in Faith and Ethics*. Baylor University, 2007, pp. 20-26.

<https://www.baylor.edu/IFL/index.php?id=937688>.

Barna, George. *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014.

---. *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005.

---. *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*. Kindle ed. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999.

---. *User Friendly Churches*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991.

Barrett, C.K. *The Epistle to the Romans*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957. Harper's New Testament Commentaries.

Bowers, Laurene Beth. *Invitational Ministry: Move Your Church from Membership to Discipleship*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013.

- Bowling, John C. *Grace-Full Leadership: Understanding the Heart of a Christian Leader*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2000.
- Brown, Daron. "Pressing on by Shaping Culture." *Church of the Nazarene Pensions and Benefits Newsletter*, Jul/Aug/Sep 2017. 6-7.
- Coleman, Robert E. *The Master Plan of Discipleship*. Old Tappen, NJ: Revell, 1987.
- . *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 2005.
- Detter, Alfred L. *The Assessment of Newcomer Assimilation and the Development of an Assimilation Model at Grace Baptist Church*. 1989. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, D. Min. Dissertation. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1989.
- Dorsey, Jim, editor. *Missional Hearts: Best Practices for Effective Evangelism*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2005.
- Duin, Julia. *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About it*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.
- Fannin, Coleman. "Dorothy Day's Radical Hospitality," *Hospitality: Christian Reflections, A Series in Faith and Ethics*. Baylor University, 2007, pp. 11-19.
<https://www.baylor.edu/IFL/index.php?id=937688>.
- Farris, Patricia. *Review: The Welcoming Congregation*. Posted October 8th, 2012.
<http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3297/review-the-welcoming-congregation>. Web. 22 June 2017.
- Franks, Danny. *People are the Mission: How Churches Can Welcome Guests Without Compromising the Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.
- Frost, Michael. *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement*. Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014.

George, Carl F. *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1992.

---. *The Coming Church Revolution*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1994.

Hendricks, William D. *Exit Interviews*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1993.

Hill, Derek. *What Does the Bible Say About Hospitality? A Christian Study*. 8 January 2013. <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/what-does-the-bible-say-about-hospitality-a-christian-study/print/>.

Heldt, Jean-Paul. "Revisiting the 'Whole Gospel': Toward a Biblical Model of Holistic Mission in the 21st Century." *Missiology*, vol. 32, no. 2, Apr. 2004, pp. 149-72. ezproxy.asburyseminary.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001473114&site=eds-live..

Hunter, George G. ed. *The Pastor's Guide to Growing a Christlike Church*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2004.

---. *To Spread the Power*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Jamieson, Alan. *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys beyond the Churches*. London: SPCK, 2002.

Kettle, David. "Believing without Belonging? Cultural Change Seen in Theological Context." *International Review of Mission*, vol. 94, no. 375, Oct. 2005, pp. 507-24. EBSCOhost, ezproxy.asburyseminary.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001513351&site=eds-live..

Malm, Jonathan. *Unwelcome: 50 Ways Churches Drive Away First-Time Visitors*. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Church Communications, 2014.

Maxwell, John C. *Developing the Leaders Around You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995.

- McIntosh, Gary L. *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009.
- Mendenhall, Susan Eaton. "Can Churches Become a Third Place for Community?" *Hospitality: Making a Great First Impression*. *Net Results Magazine*, March/April 2006. www.netresults.org.
- Nessan, Craig L. "Christian Imagination and Congregational Evangelism." *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 28, no. 1, Feb. 2001, pp. 38-46. *EBSCOhost*, ezproxy.asburyseminary.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001406740&site=eds-live.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *Mission in Christ's Way*. Geneva: WCC, 1987.
- Nielson, Joseph F. *The Theology of Assimilation*.
<http://nazarene.org/files/docs/The%20Theology%20of%20Assimilation.pdf>.
- Pohl, Christine. "Building a Place for Hospitality." *Hospitality: Christian Reflections, A Series in Faith and Ethics*. Baylor University, 2007.
<https://www.baylor.edu/IFL/index.php?id=937688>. 27-36.
- . *Living in Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011.
- . "Welcoming the Stranger," *Sojourners*. July-August 1999.
<http://sojo.net/magazine/1999/07/welcoming-stranger>.
- Rainer, Thom S. *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*. Nashville: Zondervan, 2010.
- Roxburgh, Alan J. and Fred Romanuk. *The Missional Leader. Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

- Rushing, Brian E. *A Study of the Effect of Intentional Member Retention Strategies on the Assimilation of Southern Baptist Church Members*. 2007. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Ph. D. Dissertation. ProQuest (304840321).
- Russell, Letty M, Kate M. Ott and J. Shannon Clarkson. *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*. eBook Collection, EBSCO HOST, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Schaller, Lyle E. *The Middle Sized Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985.
- Schwarz, Christian A. *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*. Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart, 1998.
- Sharp, Kathy Chapman. "How to Change the World with Christian Hospitality." 29 February 2016. <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Christian-Hospitality>.
- Southerland, Dan. *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change*. Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1999.
- Stanley, Andy. *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Stedman, Ray. *Body Life*. Glendale, CA: Regal Books-C/L Publishing, 1992.
- Stetzer, Ed and Thom S. Rainer. *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations*. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2010.
- Tanner, Douglas K. *From Visitor to Minister: Designing a Program for the Assimilation of New Members into The Life and Ministry of the Local Church*. 2005. Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, D. Min. Dissertation.
<http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1408&context=documental>.

Tenny-Brittian, Bill. "Platinum Rule Of Hospitality." *The Effective Church Group*.

<http://churchhospitality.us/the-platinum-rule-of-hospitality/>.

Waltz, Mark L. *How to Wow Your Church Guests: 101 Ways to Make a Meaningful First Impression*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2011.

---. *Lasting Impressions (Revised): From Visiting to Belonging*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2009.

Werlein, E. Kenneth. *From Teflon to Velcro: Assimilating Newcomers into Faithbridge UMC*. 2011. Asbury Theological Seminary, D.Min. Dissertation, 2011.

Westerhoff, Caroline A. "Boundary and Hospitality." *Hospitality: Christian Reflections, A Series in Faith and Ethics*. Baylor University, 2007, pp. 84-89.

<https://www.baylor.edu/IFL/index.php?id=937688>.

White, James Emery. *Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003.

---. *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.